

(24)

# FRAGMENTS from the PAST

*Selected Writings and Speeches of*

**ARUNA ASAF ALI**

*With a Biographical Introduction*



**PATRIOT PUBLISHERS**  
New Delhi



No part from this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without prior written permission from the publishers.

*Published by*

**Patriot Publishers**  
1/26 A, Lalita Park,  
Laxmi Nagar,  
Delhi - 110092

*Typesetting at*

**Technology Division,**  
United India Periodicals Pvt. Ltd.  
Link House,  
Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg  
New Delhi - 110002

*Printed by*

**United India Press**  
Link House  
Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg  
New Delhi - 110002

# Contents

## PART I

### THE HEROINE OF 1942

By Dhan

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| 1. Introduction             | 3  |
| 2. The Young Debutante      | 4  |
| 3. Budding Politician       | 8  |
| 4. Aruna Goes Underground   | 14 |
| 5. Free Again               | 24 |
| 6. Aruna the Leader         | 30 |
| 7. At the Feet of Gandhi    | 37 |
| 8. Aruna Argues with Gandhi | 40 |
| 9. Itinerant Aruna          | 53 |

## PART II

### TRAVEL TALK

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. The Return                      | 67  |
| 2. Men Who Rode the Storm          | 70  |
| 3. Mould for Action                | 74  |
| 4. Seven Weeks Seven Cities        | 78  |
| 5. Fraternities: Social Groupings  | 84  |
| 6. Approach to Personalities       | 89  |
| 7. Hundred Men Meet Future Horizon | 93  |
| 8. The Casual Chain                | 97  |
| 9. Bhagat Singh's Anniversary      | 101 |
| 10. Delhi After Three Years        | 104 |



|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 11. Railway Receptions            | 109 |
| 12. Pedantry in Politics          | 112 |
| 13. The New Reality               | 116 |
| 14. Nectar Turns Poison           | 121 |
| 15. Dishevelled Times             | 125 |
| 16. Magic Mountain                | 129 |
| 17. Half-Way House                | 133 |
| 18. Then and Now                  | 137 |
| 19. Now and Then                  | 141 |
| 20. Our Name is Legion            | 144 |
| 21. Weapons of Liberty            | 147 |
| 22. Sermonizing and Soliloquizing | 151 |
| 23. Long Memories                 | 155 |
| 24. Twenty-One Days               | 160 |
| 25. Group Insanity                | 166 |
| 26. The Ganges in Mourning        | 171 |
| 27. Death Festival                | 176 |

### PART III

#### TOPICS INDIAN AND INTERNATIONAL

##### A. Building the Nation

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. Imperatives of Left Unity                  | 183 |
| 2. Memories of '42                            | 189 |
| 3. Behind Link House                          | 194 |
| 4. Thoughts on Independence Day               | 208 |
| 5. On the Death of Jawaharlal                 | 212 |
| 6. The Nehru Legacy                           | 215 |
| 7. A Year without Nehru                       | 239 |
| 8. Eighteen Years after Gandhi                | 243 |
| 9. The New Challenge                          | 248 |
| 10. Delhi As A Symbol                         | 254 |
| 11. Will the Congress Survive ?               | 256 |
| 12. Looking Back                              | 262 |
| 13. Republic and the People                   | 269 |
| 14. Jawaharlal Remembered                     | 275 |
| 15. Socialist-Communist Unity                 | 280 |
| 16. Centenary Reflections                     | 287 |
| 17. Opportunity for Progress                  | 291 |
| 18. Vigilant Leadership for A Vigilant People | 295 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 19. End of the Two-Nation Myth                   | 299 |
| 20. The Unfulfilled Task                         | 304 |
| 21. The Republic in Retrospect                   | 313 |
| 22. Gandhiji and the Days Preceding Independence | 319 |
| 23. Towards An Era of Peace, New Order           | 324 |
| 24. Anguish, Triumph and Hope                    | 332 |
| 25. 1975—A New Tryst ?                           | 337 |
| 26. Thirty Years of Freedom                      | 342 |
| 27. Republic Day Thoughts                        | 346 |
| 28. National Federation of Indian Women          | 352 |
| 29. Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration | 360 |
| 30. Making the Constitution Meaningful           | 363 |
| <br>   |     |
| B. India in the World                            |     |
| 31. World Congress of Women                      | 366 |
| 32. Moscow Revisited                             | 369 |
| 33. London—A Profile                             | 373 |
| 34. Japan: New Horizons                          | 376 |
| 35. A Letter from Abroad...                      | 380 |
| 36. Havana: Focus of Three Continents            | 385 |
| 37. Reflections on the Soviet Union              | 391 |
| 38. Lenin—A Tribute                              | 398 |
| 39. Three Decades of Friendship                  | 403 |
| 40. Two Significant Anniversaries                | 408 |

### PART IV

#### RADIANT PERSONALITIES

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. Gandhiji: Some Reminiscences                            | 413 |
| 2. My Discovery of Nehru                                   | 420 |
| 3. Kamala Nehru: Brave Pioneer                             | 435 |
| 4. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Scholar, Patriot, Statesman    | 440 |
| 5. Asaf Ali: Patriot and Humanist                          | 446 |
| 6. Acharya Narendra Dev: A Tribute                         | 448 |
| 7. Rameshwari Nehru: Gentle Crusader                       | 453 |
| 8. Satyawati Devi: Role of Delhi Women in Freedom Struggle | 458 |
| 9. Dr. A.V. Baliga: A Source of Inspiration                | 466 |
| 10. Indira Gandhi: Slender Girl Who Became Immortal        | 469 |



---

## **PART I**

# **THE HEROINE OF 1942**

**By Dhan**

---

Booklet on Aurna Asaf Ali brought out by New India Publications  
at Lahore in 1947.



# THE HEROINE OF 1942

## 1. Introduction

"Things are seldom what they seem, skim milk masquerades as cream" can truly be applied to Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali, one of the top-most leaders of the Congress Socialist Party. Her placid appearance belies the stormy impatience and restlessness of her soul, her tiny mouth holds a fluent tongue, her small head carries an active brain. She has taken millions by storm by her fiery speeches.

The famous wife of a famous man has not made a name for herself by blindly following in her husband's footsteps like Kasturba Gandhi or by sharing the burden of politics with her husband like Sucheta Kripalani. Aruna, though working for the same cause as her husband, has deviated from the beaten track and chosen an independent by-path to the tantalising gates of freedom. She has without hesitation and with dauntless courage expressed her difference of opinion with the seasoned leaders.

If ever she has been harsh and insolent to her elders and betters it is because she is sincere about making India free. If ever she has taken a hasty step it is because of her impatient hostility towards the foreign rule. If ever she has encouraged violence in the hearts of the Indian nation it is because she wants to drive the Britishers out of India at any cost.

The future historian may judge her harshly but we must remember that Aruna came forward at the time when the country was at the verge of political disaster. With her courageousness, selflessness and determination she sacrificed her all and kept the ball of Quit India rolling.



God was quite a novel experience. It was her first introduction to this Mysterious Being and she was eager to know more about Him.

### SPELL OF THE CONVENT

Aruna and her younger sister, Purnima, received their early education in the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Lahore where their father was at that time working as a journalist. Aruna like her sister and brothers was surprisingly clever. She almost always topped the list in her class. "Irene" as she was known in school soon became quite a favourite of the Mother Superior who often related the stories of the sufferings of Jesus Christ to her students and gave the girls who were interested, biblical books to read. Young Aruna was so much taken up by the Roman Catholic religion and the secluded life of the nuns that she herself began to think seriously of renouncing the world and adopting the black veil and the cross, taking the severe vows of celibacy, obedience and poverty and spending the rest of her life behind the formidable Convent walls. She spent many a sleepless night not knowing what decision to take. Finally, she made up her mind to become a nun but when she broke the news to her parents they were shocked and scandalized. After giving her a sound scolding they had her removed from the Catholic atmosphere which in her parents' opinion had filled Aruna's little head with unbecoming and impractical ideas, and sent her to a Protestant school at Nainital where Mr. Ganguli had by that time opened a hotel. Aruna thus finished her education at Nainital.

### ARUNA GROWS UP

Aruna grew up into a charming young woman. She was small and delicate with an olive complexion, small, black, deep-set eyes, and black, wavy, dishevelled hair which unlike other Bengalee girls was short and which to this day she has never been able to keep tidy. She even finds it difficult to keep the *pulla* of her saree on her head. Wearing pretty clothes was her weakness. Her taste in choice of her clothes was most unique. She, even today, is very particular about choosing simple yet fine Khaddar with artistic prints for her sarees. She pays great attention to personal cleanli-

## 2. The Young Debutante

### FIRST GLIMPSE

"Here she comes", said one of the Press reporters. There was a bustle among the photographers who stood alert with their cameras as a taxi decorated with flowers drove into the compound of the Bradlaugh Hall in Lahore. Outstepped a petite woman in simple brown *chappis*, clad in a white Khaddar saree and a beige coloured shawl thrown carelessly across her shoulders. Her underground activities had told on her health. She entered the room smiling where journalists had assembled to hear what she had to say. This young rebel who felt that India should be made free, if necessary by revolution, and who had been bold enough to express her disagreement with some of the topmost leaders of the Indian nationalist movement was no other than Aruna Devi as she now calls herself.

Aruna hails from a Bramahcharya (Brahmo Samaj) family of Bengal. Her father Mr. Ganguli was a very intelligent man but he being a rolling stone failed to gather any moss. Her mother was also a Bramahcharyist. She was a very quiet, affectionate and a homely woman. After marriage Mr. and Mrs. Ganguli did not remain for long in Bengal. They spent most of the years at Kalka where Mr. Ganguli was in charge of the Kalka railway refreshment room.

Aruna the eldest child of the family of two girls and three boys was unassuming though obstinate as a child. Even in her childhood she loved to command. Her religious interest was aroused when at seven she went to visit some of her friends. To her, the offering of prayers to some Mysterious and Invisible Being called



ness. In spite of her wearing pretty clothes and her sense of cleanliness she is inclined to be careless about the way she dresses. Her carelessness in dress, however, gives her a charming negligé appearance which only adds to her attraction and her exquisite personality. Being of a quiet temperament, she likes to be left alone. Like all solitude loving people she is a great lover of books. Books have always been her companions. Her collection includes classics, poetry, fiction, philosophy and politics. Her fine and convincing manner of speech is enough to captivate anyone. Even those who may differ in their opinion or disagree with her point of view like to listen to her attentively. Strong socialist-minded Aruna talks to any and everybody in her usual pleasant style.

The growing Aruna was a growing anxiety to her parents. Like all old fashioned Indian parents, they thought that it was high time they found a husband for their daughter. But Aruna, the born rebel, was not going to take things lying down. Her English education had filled her receptive mind with Western ideas and she was not the one to accept the husband chosen by her parents with philosophic resignation to fate, natural to her Eastern sisters. She left her home to earn her own living. She went to Calcutta and started teaching at the Gokhale Memorial School for Girls. Her chief ambition was to earn enough money to enable her to proceed to England for higher studies. But before she could earn enough money fate led her to a different path.

#### INTO THE ARMS OF MATRIMONY

A great change in her life came when she went to spend a part of her summer vacation at Allahabad with her sister Purnima who had been married to a Bengalee gentleman called Banerjee. It was here that she met her Prince Charming—Asaf Ali. This young barrister with a flourishing practice in Delhi had then returned from Calcutta after attending a meeting of the Muslim League. At Allahabad, he intended staying for a short time with his very old friends the Banerjees. Asaf Ali was quite a well-known figure even in those days. He had courted imprisonment in the days of non-cooperation in 1920 and was respected by all. His slow manner of speech, his Oxonian accent and his smart suit tailored by Asquith and Lord attracted Aruna. Besides, he like her was interested in English Literature. Both had many a drawing room dis-

cussion on poets and authors. Little did Aruna guess at that time that she was slowly drifting into the arms of matrimony. These literary discussions brought the two young people close together and the result was a proposal of marriage from Asaf Ali and the acceptance by Aruna. As expected, Aruna's parents did not approve of this match. First of all there was the most important point—religion. He was a follower of Muhammad while she was a Hindu. Then there was a vast difference in their ages. He was forty-one while she only eighteen. Once again Aruna had to stand up against her parents and once again she succeeded in having her way. In spite of all obstructions the couple who found love, agreement and perfect harmony in their hearts was joined in matrimony. They had a quiet wedding, only two relatives of Aruna and a few common friends being present at the marriage ceremony.

This inter-provincial and inter-communal marriage proved a great success. Aruna had made a wise choice indeed. She found the ideal man in Asaf Ali; as she herself tells us, "no husband could be more generous and liberal than Asaf Ali".

After marriage Mr. and Mrs. Asaf Ali shifted to Delhi. Aruna took a great interest in her new home and decorated it most tastefully. Asaf Ali who was a very popular figure in the society proudly introduced his Anglicised wife to his wide circle of friends. Aruna proved an excellent hostess and always appeared happy and blooming with life. She liked the social life she led.

Asaf Ali in his spare time used to write poetry in Urdu on his charming wife. He felt rather disappointed because Aruna, who had only a limited knowledge of Urdu, couldn't appreciate her husband's poetry. Dr. Farid Ansari often teased her by saying "Bhabhi, when will you learn to speak Urdu? Asaf Ali is writing so many poems on you that there is every likelihood of an ink famine. You, however, cannot understand his masterpieces". After being teased constantly thus, Aruna at last made up her mind to learn Urdu and she did with the help of her affectionate mother-in-law.

Today, Aruna who does not know her mother-tongue very well, because of her not having lived in Bengal for long, speaks perfect Urdu.



thing that amused and puzzled Aruna was the name of the jail. It was called Lahore Female Jail. Aruna remarked: "Why is this jail called a female jail? Why should it not be called a women's jail? Surely jail has no gender".

In the 1932 movement Aruna was again imprisoned and was ordered to pay a fine of Rs. 200. She refused to pay the fine and the police instead of getting the money from her husband walked away with some of her most expensive sarees which had been gifts from Asaf Ali. In those days political prisoners in Delhi District Jail had received a rough and callous treatment. As a protest, bold Aruna went on hunger strike. Although she fell ill, she kept up her fast until the jail authorities agreed to the demands of the political detenus. The government, however, tried to punish her by transferring her to Ambala jail which was a man's jail and where she was kept in solitary confinement.

### BACK TO SOCIAL GAITY

When the term of her imprisonment expired Aruna returned to Delhi and for the next ten years took no part in politics. She contented herself by leading a busy social life once again.

Mr. Asaf Ali who devoted most of his time to politics often had a number of friends visiting him while Aruna acted the charming hostess. But it was not very long before Aruna's dynamic personality compelled her to do something for her country. Although she had courted imprisonment twice mainly with the intention of keeping pace with her husband and her sense of loyalty to the Congress, she was by no means a political worker. Merely taking part in the annual session of the All India Women's Conference did not satisfy her desire, but she did not know in what way she could help the Indians to win their freedom.

### GANDHISM OR SOCIALISM?

Indian politics in those days was very confusing. It was not an easy matter for her to decide whether to follow Gandhism or Socialism. She spent some of her leisure time in making a deep study of politics and tried to form her own ideas about setting India free. Somehow, Socialist ideas began to enter her head. She often said, "There are a lot of things we have got to break. A lot

## 3. Budding Politician

### FIRST TASTE OF JAIL LIFE

In the early days of her married life, Aruna was not at all interested in Indian politics. In fact, she had no sympathy whatsoever with Indian aspirations. Her attitude towards Khaddarites was a mixture of ridicule and sneer. But when Gandhiji launched his salt tax campaign Aruna naturally drifted into the world of politics. Asaf Ali who had taken an active part in the *Satyagraha* was arrested. His arrest aroused the political instinct latent in her and she started her political career by making a fiery speech about the origin and significance of the rebellion of 1857. The Chief Commissioner of Delhi thought that he would scare this newcomer in politics away by prosecuting her for being a vagrant, having no place of residence and ostensible means of livelihood and by ordering her to furnish a security for good behaviour. As the young revolutionary refused to grant a security she was arrested and sent to Lahore Jail for a year's imprisonment. After a few months when under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact all the political prisoners were released, the Government decided to detain Aruna. When Aruna's prison-mates heard this, they refused to leave the jail until Aruna was set free. The Superintendent of the prison was in a dilemma. He tried to argue with the ladies for about fourteen hours but all in vain. The women remained determined in their resolve. It was only when Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ansari intervened and sent telegrams asking them not to insist that they left the jail. Aruna's detention caused an agitation all over India. Finally the Government had to give in to the public. On being released, Aruna was given an enthusiastic reception by a large number of her friends including Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan outside the jail premises. One



of things that were taken for granted". By her entry into a Muslim family, she understood Muslim problems thoroughly well. She felt that the Congress many a time irritated the Muslims without being conscious of the fact. The Vidya Mandir Scheme, she thought, was a case of adding fuel to the fire. The very name was objectionable and irritating. Her idea was that the Mogul period was an ideal period and those sentiments ought to be reawakened and revived with great intensity. She was of the opinion that not Ram Raj but the reign of Akbar and the Mogul period should be our guides. Urdu script, she thought, should have an equal place with the Hindi script. "The trouble is," she would say, "nationalism is such a holy concept to Indians that they instinctively express their feelings towards it in religious symbolism being the highest thing they know. Women go to jail as they would go to the temple. Inevitably, the mode of thought is Hindu. They call on the name of God in their songs and so on. If we are to appeal to the Muslim masses, they must be approached in the idiom they will understand and we shall alienate them if we thoughtlessly go on like this. I know no offence is meant, but the point is that offence is taken". Thus she taxed her little brain trying to find a way out. It was only when she came in contact with people like Jaya Prakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan and Ram Manohar Lohia that could she make up her mind and say "towards Socialism I shall march".

#### IMPRISONED AGAIN

In 1940 Gandhiji launched his Civil Disobedience Movement as a protest against the way India had been dragged into the war. The Mahatma was so keen to keep this *Satyagraha* pure and undefiled by the touch of those who believe in violence that only those who believed cent per cent in the Gandhian constructive programme of the Congress were chosen. Gandhiji himself selected the *Satyagrahis*. Mrs. Asaf Ali's name was also on the list. Little did Gandhiji guess at that time this young follower of his would one day defy his non-violent creed and lead the British Government to a pretty dance.

By the end of the year Aruna was arrested in Delhi and sent to Lahore Jail. To her surprise it was still called the Lahore Female Jail! The Jail is now placated "Lahore Women's Jail"—thanks to Aruna.

Because of her desire to be left alone, she demanded a C-class cell instead of an A-class which she would have had to share. She decorated her cell with pretty curtains and made the place look gay. She used to spin but did not enjoy what she described as "ritualisation of spinning". Another thing which she did not like was their Sunday morning procession through the garden. Although she did not keep good health and had to live on a very simple diet, she never complained. Aruna seemed to have reminded herself "many a soul is far worse off than me". She was very helpful to the C-class prisoners. She tried to make them happy by giving them small things such as a comb or a skein of embroidery silk. But she was very tactful about the way she gave these presents. She did not let her generosity be mistaken for charity. Whenever there was trouble in the jail, either with the authorities or among the prisoners, Aruna was always ready to take the matter into her own hands and always succeeded in settling whatever the dispute. She held weekly meetings in which she related the news of the week to all the women. She wanted to educate the women who had come to jail. She tried to explain politics to them. This proved quite a difficult task as even some of those *Satyagrahis* who had a devotion for Mahatmaji, knew hardly anything of politics and nothing at all of the world outside India.

#### HISTORIC A.I.C.C. SESSION

In August 1942 Asaf Ali took his charming wife to Bombay in order to attend the forty-fifth session of the All India Congress Committee. Asaf Ali had by then become a very prominent Congress leader. Aruna was her usual self—pleasant, graceful and social as ever. She was in fact one of the most prominent figures in the *pandal* that day. Little did she or any one else who saw her then realise that this young society lady would on the following day, make a name for herself in the political field.

On August 9, early in the morning all the important Congress leaders were arrested. When Aruna heard this she rushed to Bori Bunder where a special train was waiting to carry the leaders to an unknown destination. Aruna tried to enter the station but she was stopped by a police inspector with "we have no warrants for you". But she insisted upon entering the station in order to see things for herself. The police inspector warned her, "you might be



insulted," but Aruna turned a deaf ear to his warning and boldly made her way to the station. There she saw, "every carriage window framed a face known, respected and loved by millions". Gandhiji appeared grim and stern. Jawaharlal angry—a lost-in-thought look in his eyes.

After the train steamed out of the platform Aruna drove back home. Her blood was boiling at the sight she had seen. "Pearl Harbour methods," she said "are anathemic when practised by yellow-skinned Japs. When employed to crush a revolt they signify forethought, courageousness and rulership. Entrenched authority, an usurper authority had decided not to allow freedom of movement, speech or action to natives demanding its withdrawal". As for herself she could not decide as to what action she should take. Since the Congress had not chalked out a definite programme she did not know how to implement the Quit India resolution of the Congress. "What should I do?" was what she kept repeating.

Finally she decided to go to the Gwalia Tank Maidan where Maulana Azad was to have performed the flag hoisting ceremony. But Azad was absent. She heard a Police Sergeant giving orders to haul down the flag which was still unfurled. While the volunteers hesitated, Aruna, who had been asked to preside over the flag hoisting ceremony, declared that the ceremony would take place as scheduled. As soon as Aruna had hoisted the flag the police released gas so as to scatter the crowd. But the crowd instead formed a procession and marched to the Congress House mad with rage.

"It was one of the many processions," says Aruna, "that defied police lawlessness that day". What pained Aruna was that when looking back at the Gwalia Tank Maidan, she saw "the White sergeant trampling over the flag that I had unfurled ten minutes ago". After seeing this humiliating treatment Aruna says, "I vowed that I would help to tear up the British rule".

Aruna spent a few days in Bombay. Her dislike for the British rule turned to hatred when she saw the police inflicting a lathi-charge on some of the poor innocent people and opening fire on the angry mob. Her feelings of non-violence were changed to the spirit of retaliation.

#### A FUGITIVE REVOLUTIONARY

Aruna went to Delhi knowing fully well that she would be

arrested any day. She also realised that her arrest would mean the end of her work with which she had planned to implement the Quit India resolution. Besides, the people who were now deprived of their leaders needed guidance, so she decided to go underground.

During her short stay in Delhi she tried to organise a powerful resistance movement among the Congress workers who were still out of jail. She delivered a message of hope and put new life in the students of Delhi.

After starting the Indian Resistance Movement in Delhi, she left her hometown not knowing herself where she was going and for the next two and half years kept wandering from place to place in different disguises and led the life of a fugitive revolutionary.



## 4. Aruna Goes Underground

### THE ELUSIVE ARUNA

The British Government on discovering that Mrs. Asaf Ali had disappeared, offered a reward of Rs. 5,000 for the capture of the young absconder. But she, each time, proved too smart for the C.I.D. people who tried their best to hunt her down.

How she drove the police almost mad is evident from the report of a police officer who after making frantic efforts to trace Aruna said to his boss, "as against nine of us who are searching for her, there were nine lakhs in Delhi alone to offer her protection and quarter. It is an uneven game and you cannot blame us if we cannot succeed."

When after the Bhansali demonstration three lady Congress workers met the Executive Councillor, he seemed desperate and shouted: "Take me to Mrs. Asaf Ali and I'll explain everything to her".

Nobody could say that they had met Aruna. Like the elusive pimpinel, she was here, she was there, she was everywhere and yet she was nowhere.

There are a number of stories connected with her underground life. They tell of her sufferings, her sacrifices, her narrow escapes from the police and are enough to take one's breath away. Here are some of the stories.

Once she was warned that the place where she was putting up was no longer safe and that she should shift to some other place immediately. The notice was so short that she was at a loss to decide as to where she should go. Fortunately she got a brain wave.

In the morning papers she had read an advertisement that an English family wanted an European paying guest. Aruna got into a taxi and dashed to the address advertised. The good old English lady was so captivated by Aruna's charming personality and manners that she decided to wave aside her stipulations in favour of an European boarder and accepted Aruna as her paying guest. When the police arrived in great triumph to arrest her they found to their bewilderment that the "mysterious bird had slipped out of their hands once again".

On another occasion Aruna fell ill. Dysentery from which she suffered was so serious that she was reduced to a bag of bones. Her underground comrades pressed her to take some rest and they arranged for her stay in a middle class family. On the second day a Government official, a good friend of Aruna's, paid a surprise visit to that family. Having known the family for a long time he walked into the house unannounced. To his amazement he found Aruna—the arch rebel. Aruna's host found himself in an awkward position but she came to the rescue of all. In her usual homely way she greeted him and talked to him as if he had come to her own house at Delhi. The officer instead of reporting to the police said that he had been "privileged to have lived for a few moments, at any rate, in the presence of living history".

Despite police and C.I.D. vigilance Aruna once visited the residence of her sister, Purnima, where her mother was lying ill on her death bed. She could not, however, make it possible to be by the side of her mother during the last moments of her life.

After being released Asaf Ali went to Wellington Hospital for treatment. The police got the news that Aruna had gone to hospital to see her husband. They hurried to the hospital but felt foolish on learning that the lady who had called on Asaf Ali was Aruna's sister from Allahabad.

When Asaf Ali flew from Bombay to Simla, a nurse had accompanied him. Some police official got into his head that Aruna was attending to her husband under the disguise of a nurse.

All sorts of enquiries were made so as to ascertain whether the nurse was real or false. Since the police could not come to any definite conclusion, a genius of a police official by a subterfuge got the measurements of the nurse. As the nurse was two inches shorter in height than Aruna, the police was finally convinced that the



nurse in question was not Aruna unless she had chopped off two inches of her height.

Once, Mrs. Bhimani came to stay with Asaf Ali. An officer of the Viceroy's household got the hint that Mrs. Bhimani was in reality Aruna. He carried the photograph of Aruna in his pocket and by a clever ruse confronted Mrs. Bhimani at a tea party. He was surprised that the guest of Asaf Ali resembled Aruna so much except for the fact that Mrs. Bhimani was two inches taller than Aruna.

It is believed that more than half a dozen persons including an architect, a pilot officer, (Mr. Patnaik), a garage owner and a Secretariat official were detained in prison for a considerable time because they were suspected of having given shelter to Aruna.

Aruna while underground did very useful work for her countrymen. She and her colleagues toured the famine stricken areas often and tried to help the poor villagers by looking after their needs and also giving advice to the poor families of political absconders. They organized radio stations to inform the people how their revolt was progressing.

It may be recalled that after the release of political prisoners in 1945 a meeting of Congress Working Committee was held in Calcutta. The most important resolution passed was the resolution on non-violence. Even the Viceroy had accused the Congress of its violent activities and had stated that the wife of a Working Committee member had organized a strong movement to sabotage the Government's war efforts through violent means. The Working Committee after a five-day session passed a resolution reaffirming the Congress creed of non-violence and asking the Congressmen to stick to the non-violent creed in the struggle for freedom.

The following is the text of the resolution on non-violence:—

"After the arrest of the principal Congressmen in August of 1942 the unguided masses took the reins in their own hands and acted almost spontaneously. If many acts of heroism and sacrifice are to their credit there were acts done which could not be included in non-violence. It is, therefore, necessary for the Working Committee to affirm for the guidance of all concerned that the policy of non-violence adopted in 1920 by the Congress continues

unabated and that such non-violence does not include burning of public property, cutting of telegraph wires, derauling trains and intimidation.

"The Working Committee is of the opinion that the policy of non-violence as detailed in the Congress resolution of 1920, since expanded and explained from time to time and action in accordance with it, has raised India to a height never attained before.

"The Working Committee is further of the opinion that the constructive activities of the Congress beginning with the spinning wheel and Khadi as the centre are emblematic of the policy of non-violence and that every other Congress activity including what is known as the parliamentary programme is subservient to and designed to promote the constructive activities as explained by Mahatma Gandhi.

"The Working Committee is of the opinion that civil disobedience, mass or any other, meant for the attainment of freedom, is inconceivable without the adoption of the constructive programme on the widest scale possible by the masses of India."

Immediately after the conclusion of the Congress Working Committee the Congress president, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, explained at a press conference the various resolutions passed by the Working Committee during its present session.

The Congress president said that the resolution on non-violence was the most important of the resolutions passed in Calcutta during the last four or five days. "I emphasise," said Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, "the resolution is the most important one, because ever since the August 1942 struggle, people have begun to believe that the Congress creed of non-violence no longer binds the country in general and Congressmen in particular. There has been a growing feeling among people that it is not necessary to adhere strictly to the principle of non-violence in our struggle for political freedom. This is absolutely wrong. It is for the purpose of removing this confusion and misconception in public mind that the Working Committee has thought it necessary to reaffirm the Congress creed of non-violence once again. We have reiterated our faith in non-violence as the only means to achieve our political objective with all the strength possible".



## ARUNA SPEAKS FROM—?

After reading this resolution of the Working Committee and the explanatory statement of the Congress president, Aruna Asaf Ali and Achyut Patwardhan sent from "somewhere in India" the following statement to Maulana Azad: "The authors of the letter regard this resolution as a summary judgement upon the complete events of the past three years and request the Congress president to re-examine the issues more specifically and formulate specific charges and provide them with facilities for appearing before a duly constituted tribunal to vindicate their stand. The resolution, they state, is bound to be interpreted as a reflection upon their alleged lapse from the path of duty to the struggle for freedom and since they have no sense of wrong doing, they demand not merely a vindication of their self-respect but also the respect that their point of view deserved in the ranks of the Congress".

The following is the text of the letter addressed to the Congress president by Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali and Mr. Achyut Patwardhan from "somewhere in India".

The President,

Indian National Congress

Dear Maulana Sahib,

We have read carefully the resolution of the Congress Working Committee on the subject of non-violence passed on 11-12-45. We have pondered the implication of the past three years and analysed its emphasis governing present policy and its significance in relation to any future struggle in which the Indian people may be involved. Your personal annotation of the same resolution, issued in a press statement, has also clarified the perspective in which these policies are outlined. Since the resolution records the Congress Working Committee's considered views on events and developments of the past three years, with some of which we have been vitally concerned along with other colleagues, it becomes necessary to define our position unequivocally and to bear our share of responsibility for our policies and activities during the period of your incarceration.

The resolution states in the first paragraph that after the arrest of the principal Congressmen the unguided masses acted almost spontaneously. This is not a complete accurate statement of

facts. There were in Bombay about a dozen prominent workers from the various provinces who held responsible positions in the Congress organisation, after your arrest. Amongst us were several colleagues whose allegiance to Gandhiji's creed of truth and non-violence cannot be questioned. We were responsible along with these other colleagues for setting up an organization to convey what we believed to be necessary directions to thousands of Congress workers and others who were still out of jail and who were anxious to implement the resolution of 8th August, 1942. We all recognised the urgent necessity of providing some guidance to the vast forces that were being unleashed, instructions, directives, appeals and proclamations and the day-to-day exhortations (broadcast by the Congress Radio) were issued from time to time after your arrest in the name of the All India Congress.

If we speak of our doings it is only with the desire to assume personal responsibility for whatever policies were formulated and implemented in the name of All India Congress throughout this entire period. Our authority for assuming such responsibility was never questioned and we received the unstinted support of large sections of our people.

The spontaneous response of the people to the Congress call to act as free men is the greatest phenomenon of recent history yet. Once they had set their marching foot upon the path of revolt, they clamoured for effective and undaunted guidance. They asked to be organized to whatever degree the terror regime would allow and their genius triumphed for a time over all the machinations and force of the White man's *raj*. With respect to dislocation, secrecy and intensive forms of social boycott and other attacks upon authority many specific instructions were issued. By a large majority such advice was widely accepted.

With regard to non-violence, Congress policy has been mainly pragmatic. From time to time it has defined its scope within limits of practicability. The Working Committee has refused to follow in the past the strict logic of Gandhian non-violence. There are its resolutions on record to prove this opinion. We have been ourselves profoundly influenced by the social values of Gandhiji's philosophy. But our acceptance of these values is essentially pragmatic and eclectic. The recognition that we fight an unjust system than merely personnel who administered it, is the essence



of our stress upon non-killing. Respect for life and private property is also a logical corollary of the same.

These values were stressed in all our directions issued under the Congress seal. Conditions of unprovoked military and police aggression, however, create situations which are by no means easy to cope with.

The resister has often only two alternatives. To resist with all his might in whatever manner seems practicable, or to submit. Under the severest tests the Congress name was never tarnished by the counsel of submission.

We took our cue from the Working Committee's resolution of July 1942. "That all aggression must be resisted, for any submission to it must mean the degradation of the Indian people and the continuation of their subjection. The Congress is anxious.... to build resistance to any aggression on India by the Japanese or any foreign power."

We also took note of Gandhiji's well-known observations upon Polish resistance. The offer of armed support to Britain under certain conditions was fresh in our minds.

Again, the agreement in principle, after your release, to join the Executive Council of the Viceroy when all that remained of the war was the re-conquest of Burma and Indonesia, did not suggest that our approach was contrary to Congress policy, otherwise it would lead us to the fantastic conclusion that certain specific acts are only permitted in alliance with the British, but those same acts become impermissible when employed against it. It is, however, quite possible that under specific circumstances, even on pragmatic grounds, there would be room for honest differences. All that we have expressed heretofore relates only to the events during your forced detention.

Insofar as the resolution in question faces us with your considered judgement, we feel called upon to assume such responsibility as inexplicably devolves upon us. This is not intended to minimise the undoubted fact of vast elemental forces spontaneously released. All the same we deliberately provided a few grains of organisational direction to the thousands of tons of mass initiative for the lack of which this unrehearsed upsurge would have collapsed in a matter of weeks rather than months.

The Congress had proclaimed its resolve to launch a mass struggle on the widest possible scale on non-violent lines. "Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it" was to be "his own guide, urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place".

But it is obvious that initiative and organisation cannot be provided by each one for himself. A set of Congressmen and women sought to fulfil this obvious gap. You have, however, deliberately ignored the fact that some of us have made a determined effort to provide direction and guidance in your absence. Further you are definite that the forms of resistance improvised were inconsistent with Congress policy of non-violence. This leaves us two loopholes. We can attribute all that happened to the spontaneous urge of a people's revolt of which we were an insignificant anonymous focus and treat your judgement as *post factum* advice for the guidance of future conduct. We may in the alternative disown our share and accept your judgement in silence. Honest conviction, however, prevents us from seeking this easier path. We were repeatedly warned that our activities might be disowned and our interpretation of the legitimate course of action repudiated. Nevertheless, we persisted in putting our faith upon one pragmatic test. "Whatever is calculated to sustain and effectively express the maximum potential resistance of the people and to vitalise their will to be free, is the legitimate path of resistance".

We feel an inner compulsion to reassert our conviction and stand by it and accept the consequences of such a step. We did not impose any dogmatic ritual of conduct upon our people. On the other hand we studied their spontaneous improvisation with such powers of discrimination as we possess and strove to inform the widely separated storm centres of revolt with the experience and lessons gathered from far-flung sectors of resistance. Our directions have led thousands to risk their lives. It would be cowardice if we did not assume our share of guidance. We were not waging a private war upon the British system.

We submit the Working Committee have done less than justice to their own good name for undaunted partisanship of freedom's cause by dismissing the momentous events of the past three years as a series of impulsive and heroic albeit undirected aberration. We remain unconvinced of our error although we may recognise



the average element of mistakes which persists in all organisational executive efforts.

As for the immediate implications of the Working Committee's resolution, it will lead to a totally fallacious postulate that a people's revolt hinges exclusively upon spontaneity. "Those who call upon the people to stake their lives upon one moment of total revolt bear the self-chosen obligation to provide an unbreakable core of guidance through organisation for the interchange of information and direction and for great co-ordination of all the available sources of resistance." This is not less necessary and becomes even decisive when the pattern of resistance is essentially decentralised. The question therefore cannot be evaded whatever honest differences there may be regarding the technique of revolt.

For lack of this recognition we witness the depressing fact of outstanding organisational talent being diverted in a lop-sided endeavour to generate enthusiasm without a corresponding effort to convert it for revitalising the instrument of resistance.

Such a policy reflects an incapacity to comprehend the lessons that the last few years have learnt upon the understanding of the commonest unknown resister. The paradox of praising the dead men as heroes while obliquely disapproving the efforts which they fearlessly undertook along with others also defeats the linking up of enthusiasm with action.

This particular form of rigidity has in the past alienated from the Congress many sturdy fighters. We therefore plead for a re-examination of these weighty issues more specifically.

The Congress has more than once sought the freedom to interpret the general policy of non-violence in a form not acceptable to Gandhiji. On the 27th July, 1940 at the A.I.C.C. session at Poona, the Congress president threw a revealing light on these matters.

"The Indian National Congress is a political organization pledged to win the political independence of the country. It is not an institution for organising world peace. Honestly we cannot go as far as Mahatma Gandhi wants us to go. Most of us felt that we were not able to take up the grave responsibility of declaring that we would completely eschew violence when we have to deal with widespread internal disorders in this country or external

aggression."

In view of a succession of deliberate deviations from the straight narrow path of non-violence some of which were initiated by Mahatma Gandhi himself (the Gelder statement dated July 2, 1940), it seems a little difficult for us to appreciate the relevance of this one-sided stress upon the implications of non-violence in the context of a total struggle.

We wish to make it plain that there is no influential section of political workers who advocate terrorism. The country in its upsurge of enthusiasm today recognises the crying need for organising all available resources without which any heroic resistance would be nine days' wonder.

It is this organization that is grievously neglected in the dust of election mock fights. We hope the threats uttered by the Secretary of State and repeated by the Viceroy and some Governors about closing the door of peaceful negotiations have not directly evoked this gesture of good behaviour.

We only hope our fears are without foundation.



expect any quarter nor shall we give any". She said that she had done useful work while underground and intended carrying on that work, the only difference was that she would now work openly.

Aruna was rather anxious to meet Gandhiji and have a talk with the father of the nation. It may be mentioned that the Mahatma while in detention in the Agha Khan Palace, in his letter to the Viceroy had condemned the violent action of those who were conducting the movement in the name of the Congress. After his release he had requested the underground workers to surrender themselves to the police. Few had responded to Gandhiji. Since Aruna had not listened to him she felt it was her duty to meet the Mahatma and explain to him what had kept her and some of her comrades underground. She was disappointed to hear that she could not have an urgent meeting as the Mahatma was on a tour to Madras. She sent him a telegram saying: "Desire to seek your blessings and pay my respects, please wire when and where it is possible".

### CALCUTTA HONOURS ARUNA

Calcutta can boast of being the first city in India to hear Aruna's voice after an interval of three and a half years. A public meeting was held at Deshbandhu Park where Aruna spoke to a large number of people from the land of her birth. The platform on which she stood had been most exquisitely designed by New Theatres Art Director, Souren Sen. The snow-white platform represented the truth on which those who were fighting for freedom of India pinned their faith for final victory. The martyr's memorial, ten feet high, consisted of a red winding pathway representing the youth climbing high and stopping at the foot of a white light—red representing the blood of the martyrs and the white light, the goal yet to be reached.

Aruna spoke to the eager crowd for more than one hour mostly in Hindustani, intermittently in English and Bengalee. She called upon the people to boycott English goods. Criticising Lord Wavell's speech in the Central Legislative Assembly, she said that there was no need for the British Government to fix a date for India's freedom, the Indians would settle it all themselves. Being an enemy of the capitalists, she pointed out that she wanted the

## 5. Free Again

### ARUNA SPOTTED

On January 25, 1946, it was officially announced that the warrants of arrest against Aruna Asaf Ali were cancelled. The two cases pending against her; first alleged dissemination of prejudicial literature which was found in Aruna's writing in a house in Karol Bagh, and which, it is alleged, was intended for publication; and the second, failure to surrender herself to the authorities as required by the order of the Chief Commissioner of Delhi, were also withdrawn.

It is amusing to note that although the higher authorities had cancelled the warrants against Aruna's arrest, the Court of Additional District Magistrate, Delhi, was quite ignorant of the fact. They still claimed Aruna as an absconder and would not give up her house in Delhi.

Four days after the cancellation of the warrants Aruna was spotted in Calcutta, by a reporter of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, driving home in a taxi. She appeared very much reduced. The excited reporter pressed her for a message and modest Aruna replied, "There is no question of feeling jubilant, leaving one's staunch comrades behind and I am not feeling happy at regaining the so-called civil liberty. While in India there are others in prison for doing what I and my other colleagues did who have yet to regain freedom, you cannot possibly expect to see me elated. If anything, I am depressed". She added that nothing personal should be mentioned about her as those were not the times for personal things. Speaking of her comrades who were still underground, she said that they did not expect any magnanimity adding, "we don't



common man to be the real master of India. Bearing this idea in mind, she said, in the negotiations for India's political settlement which were afoot the people must remember that under any negotiated settlement, power only went to the powerful, but the power achieved through struggle remained with the people. The Indian masses, therefore, she appealed, should carry on the struggle for freedom.

Aruna's admirers pressed her for a message and this is the message she gave them: "Messages from politicians are appreciated. For one who is essentially a field worker it strikes an odd note. However, if Bengal can give the lead in reviving Swadeshi movement of 1905 in 1946 spirit and bring about a total boycott of British goods, to some degree the Bengal famine deaths will have been avenged. Those haunting cries refuse to grow faint. Let us not stifle them". The terrible picture of the Bengal famine was still fresh in her mind so she asked her countrymen to avenge the wrong done to the people in famine days. In a pathetic tone she related that during the famine days, one night while walking along the road she stumbled over something and to her horror found that it was a dead body. The cries of the hungry people were still ringing in her ears. She believed that the British Government would have to answer for this deed some day. "If not you and I," she said, "the future generation will see that these deaths are avenged".

Aruna had been asked over and over again by the Assam co-workers to visit their province. But as Aruna was leaving for Delhi, she expressed her inability to do so and wrote a letter to them saying "you can imagine my disappointment at not being able to be amidst you immediately. Although Assam and I have not known each other before 1942, it seems as if you were always known to me. As soon as I am in a position to make my programme for February, I shall let you know exactly when to expect me".

#### HOMEWARD BOUND

Aruna left Calcutta for Delhi on January 31, 1946. She was given a hearty send-off at the Calcutta Railway Station. Originally she had planned to go straight to Delhi but on receiving a telegram from Pandit Nehru asking her to break her journey at Allahabad, she decided to do as he wished.

At every station crowds came to greet her. Even villagers, young and old, flocked to have a *darshan* of the heroine of 1942 revolution.

As the train steamed in at Allahabad thundering shouts of "Aruna Zindabad" were heard. Many important Congressmen including Pandit Nehru were present at the station to receive and garland her.

#### HOMAGE TO HER DEAD MOTHER

A short time after her arrival, Aruna visited the room where her mother had expired. She stood for a moment outside the room; then as she entered with slow determined steps, her old maid servant Basanti came and fell at her feet saying, "Ma Nahi" meaning mother is no more. Aruna whose heart was already heavy at these words gave vent to her feelings and burst into tears. The scene touched Basanti and Purnima who were standing nearby and they also began weeping.

In the afternoon Aruna addressed the students at Purshotamdas Tandon Park. Speaking of some of the politicians who merely sit back and criticize the action of the leaders, Aruna said, "Let us all do our duty and not indulge in useless mutual criticism. If Gandhiji, the father of the nation, gives a programme you dare not doubt his wisdom and dare not refuse to follow him. If Patel, the country's captain, asks you to abide by certain decision you dare not refuse him. If Nehru, the real leader of the people, commands you to do certain things you dare not doubt his wisdom and sincerity".

Referring to the 1942 movement she said that it had shown the way to get freedom from unwilling hands. Although they had not achieved the goal they would not lose courage. She told the students that she could not tell them in detail what work she had been doing except that she had made a humble contribution on her part. She urged the students to sustain moral and revolutionary potentialities of the people which had come to the fore since the 1942 movement. She reminded the students that merely shouting slogans would not help in getting independence. What was more important, she said, was immediate, strong and revolutionary action, "Freedom's way is through battle," she said. She warned the students to be prepared for the coming battle. "Free-



dom's battle", she said, "has to be fought and won by the strength of the people. Britishers will not free India voluntarily, you have to work for it and the strings of your bondage will be relaxed only when you are able to demonstrate your might and mien beyond all doubts." Concluding, she said, "Do or Die" was the *mantram* given by Gandhiji and she proposed to live up to it.

On her way to Delhi from Allahabad, at a small station some soldiers of the Punjab Regiment headed by some officers approached Aruna and said, "What is your message for us?" Aruna replied at once, "You must not charge on your unarmed brothers. This is my first advice. The second advice is, organise boycott of foreign goods".

Mr. Asaf Ali went to Ghaziabad to meet his devoted wife. This meeting of the couple after three and half years was very touching indeed.

At Delhi Railway Station, outside as well as inside, crowds and crowds of people gathered to greet this heroine. As the train stopped at the platform the enthusiastic crowd cheered her heartily. With much difficulty she managed to descend from the train and allowed herself to be garlanded responding with folded hands and her sweet smile.

Once outside the station she addressed the crowd with the words:

"Do not glorify me. You must glorify the martyrs of 1942. You must shout Jaya Prakash Narayan Zindabad". The crowd repeated this slogan. Proceeding she said, "There is no occasion for rejoicing over the removal of restrictions on me. Until all the political prisoners and detenus are released, I shall not consider myself free. The truth is that I feel myself less free than I felt before January 25, 1946 when I was underground and refused to recognise the laws of the British Government that stand in the way of our struggle for freedom. By all means raise slogans of freedom but under no circumstances there should be any glorification of my personality. I am but a humble and disciplined soldier of India's great and unfinished fight for freedom". Continuing she said, "So far I have been working from behind the *pardah* and have now come out in the open to serve you. The guiding star of my work is the same that inspired thousands of workers in 1942. And on the face of the shining star are written in gold the two words—'Quit

India' the words that transformed cowards into heroes and the heroes into martyrs".

### GREETINGS FROM INDIA

After this address Aruna with her husband drove to her residence—No. 2, Windsor Place. She found a big pile of letters and telegrams waiting for her. Mahatma Gandhi wrote—"So you had your way. Expect your letter...Bapu."

Mr. Ashok Mehta wrote—"Welcome from real to the unreal, from light into confusion".

Mr. Purshotamdas Tandon: "Happy at cancellation of warrants. Hearty welcome. Country is proud of your brave stand".

Mr. Kallappa, Secretary, All India Trade Union Congress: "Let me congratulate Mrs. Asaf Ali. My hat off to her sufferings during her self-imposed exile".



concentrated on the freedom of her country. Though physically she is no more with us, yet her deeds will always be a source of inspiration to us all in our work...her bravery will sustain us in our moments of hesitation and her unquestionable sincerity will serve as a beckoning light on our arduous journey—the journey that will lead us to freedom”. About her own story of her underground life she said, “It is a long tale which cannot be told at a public meeting. In a way you know that story, as you have taken a hand in writing it. It is a story that has been written by the people of India. The people of Delhi have played their part in the drama of August, 1942. You know how the people of Delhi reacted to the arrest of our leaders. Nobody who has seen people being shot in the streets of Delhi during those days can forget the scenes when people were fired at in a most cruel and shameless manner. But with great pride I declare, that the people of Delhi gave a good account of themselves and our English rulers got so frightened that they did not stir out in the streets for three weeks. Standing here before you I salute these soldiers, and in a most respectful manner I pay my homage to those martyrs who for the honour of their motherland sacrificed their lives”.

Raising her voice Aruna asked, “For whom did these brave sons and daughters of India lay their lives? For you and me is the obvious answer. They died so that we may live. And how are we going to honour those who fell in the battle of 1942? Are we just going to be content by raising slogans and putting flowers around their graves”? “No”, said Aruna in the most emphatic way, “the best way to honour them is to continue the struggle in which they lost their lives”.

Referring to her part in the August upheaval Aruna said “In obedience to Gandhiji's command, we raised the banner of open revolt in Delhi. Today, I stand before you as the symbol of those fearless men and women who generated speed in the giant wheels of Indian Revolution”.

Continuing Aruna said, “Leaders are necessary but leaders are the creation of the people. They cease to be leaders if they cut themselves from the people. The year 1942 has brought about an unprecedented psychological revolution”.

#### UNDERGROUND EXPERIENCES

Aruna then explained the meaning and purpose of the part played

## 6. Aruna the Leader

### TO THE PEOPLE OF DELHI

Aruna gave the following message to the people of Delhi: “Freedom is a misunderstood term today. While I feel overwhelmed by the warmth with which the people of Delhi have greeted me I wish them to know that for those who took part in the August rebellion, freedom from the police interference does not mean the return of civil liberties. So long as the leaders of the underground movement are not free the feeling of elation at the removal of restrictions on one individual would be a delusion”. With an air of determination she added: “I have returned as a humble soldier of India's freedom. I shall continue to work for the liberation of my country with the same vigour with which I have so far been doing”.

On being requested by the public to address a meeting, Aruna once again spoke to a vast gathering. Aruna dressed in a blue Khaddar saree started her speech by saying, “Before I relate my story I want to tell you that since I set my foot on the soil of Delhi my eyes have been searching for Satyawati. She is not in our midst today. Before you hear my report, you must think of Satyawati, the story of whose bravery, heroism and sacrifice is engraved in the mind of everyone of us”. She asked the crowd to shout “Shrimati Satyawati Zindabad”. For a moment Aruna could not speak, she felt choked with tears. “Satyawati, you all must remember”, she said, “had no other interest in life but the service of her countrymen. She worked and worked so hard during her life that the strain told on her health, and she became a total wreck. And when she lay on her death-bed her last words and thoughts were



by her. "It was not a game of hide and seek that I played for 40 months". The British Government, she continued, had made an attack on the great national organization which could be compared to the happenings at Pearl Harbour. The Government, however, did not correctly assess the strength of the people. They thought an unbridled wave of repression would frighten them, and damp their spirits. But the people of India stood upright and refused to bend the knee before John Bull who had literally run amuck. As the top leaders of the Congress had been clapped into prison, the people became their own leaders.

"It was in these circumstances," said Aruna, "that we took a resolve that as long as there is breath in us, we shall not get ourselves shut up in the prisons of the enemy. It was a grim decision which should not be compared to a game of hide and seek".

The agents of the Government, said Aruna, hunted for them but if the doors of one house were shut against them, the doors of a thousand others were opened to them. Aruna denied the story that she had been going about in a *burqa*. "How can", she asked, "a soldier do her work in a *burqa*?"

Aruna paid glowing tributes to those who had given her and her comrades shelter while putting their own lives in danger. She declared that the people of Bhagalpur, Midnapur, Satara and the Assam hills had been very kind to them.

A women's organization in Delhi had arranged a tea party in Aruna's honour but she refused the invitation saying that it was not the time for tea parties. She wanted the womenfolk to think of her colleagues who were still underground and help by collecting funds for them.

## ARUNA DIFFERS

It might be recalled that in September 1945 when Wavell returned to India after having talks with the Cabinet members in connection with the political situation in India, every one felt optimistic about India's future. Even Maulana Azad in a speech had said that freedom was fast approaching. Aruna who did not even agree with her husband where politics was concerned, criticised Maulana's views saying, "Maulana Sahib who is our respected leader said at this very place that freedom for which they had been aspiring was

about to fall in their *jholis*. It pains me to enter into an argument with Maulana Sahib, but I respectfully want to say, it is not freedom that falls into a beggar's *jholi*. We are not prepared to stand before the British Government like beggars. We must think of the martyrs of 1942 and not think in terms of compromise".

Aruna even disagreed with the Viceroy's plan that the Executive Council during the period of transition would be so constituted as to command the support of the major political parties in India. She expressed her dissatisfaction in the following words: "If this was our objective we could have got it when Cripps came to India in 1942. We need not have kindled the fire of 1942 and raised the mighty slogan of Quit India. After raising our life-giving slogan we were not going to our rulers with a bowl in our hands. We will win freedom by our sacrifices".

She did not agree even with Pandit Nehru who had, in some of his latest speeches, said that he wanted to see the tri-colour flag flying on the Red Fort. She said that she had the greatest respect for Jawaharlal Nehru but the speeches he had made had pained her. "This Red Fort," said Aruna, "is a constant reminder of our national humiliation. Every stone of this evil and monstrous structure serves us with a daily reminder of humiliation of Itahadur Shah. It was in this building that the last of our independent ruler was presented with the heads of his sons. Could there be a worse and a more heinous example of butchery?"

"Such being the ugly memories of this Red Fort, how can we tolerate even for a second the sight of this murder house where hundreds of our patriots have been done to death?"

Aruna declared that the National Flag should be hoisted, not on the Red Fort but on the Imperial Secretariat where ordinances after ordinances were manufactured in 1942 to suppress the rising of the people of India when their leaders were in Ahmednagar jail.

Concluding she said, "The path we have chosen is a difficult one. It is not a bed of roses all along the road. There are pitfalls whose jealous jaws greedily gape to swallow people alive. Then there are sharp thorns laid by the bureaucracy to prick our naked feet. The journey which we have chalked out for ourselves will be a long and an arduous one. It is beset with nerve shaking difficul-



ties. Many of our comrades will get tired and will not be able to keep pace with us. But we should not indulge in recrimination. We should be tolerant to those who in spite of their best efforts, drop out on the way. Everyone will not be in the firing line. But let those who want to kiss the bullets, kiss them. Let those who want to carry the hangman's rope around their necks, as a garland of flowers, have the privilege of wearing it. We should not drag down those who want to serve India by embracing the ugly shadows of death. It is their right to do it and it is our duty to stand by them.....to lighten the burden of their work.....to cheer them on their way to self-immolation. Such are the people who are the pride of India....the truest sons and daughters of their mothers.....the joy of this life and the glorious heritage of our ancient civilization".

#### VISIT TO THE VILLAGES

The villagers of Mehroli, Gheasa, and Bawana in Delhi province had the proud privilege of seeing Aruna during her short visit to these villages. Every man, woman and child flocked to greet her. She knew most of them personally because during the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1940, she had often toured these villages. Much as she wanted to spend a few days with them she could not, as she had some important work hanging on her shoulders at Delhi.

#### WOMEN MUST WORK WITH MEN

Aruna addressed a large gathering of women in Delhi. She related to them how badly the womenfolk were treated by the British Government during the days of August rebellion. Not only the women who took part in the movement, but also the relations of the underground workers were tortured. She paid glowing tributes to those who had stood firm against all odds.

Women, she said, must work side by side with men. Women in every land have played the rightful part in the progress of their country. In Russia, thousands of women fought in the front-line trenches and in China they enrolled themselves as guerillas. "Why should in India, my sisters keep on darning their husbands' socks, or while away their precious time in idle gossip?"

Aruna laid the following four-fold programme before her attentive listeners:

- (i) Every woman should enlist as a four-anna member of the Congress and organise herself under one flag.
- (ii) Every woman should volunteer her full time services to the Congress.
- (iii) Every woman should do constructive work as outlined by Mahatma Gandhi.
- (iv) Every woman should boycott foreign goods and launch intensive campaign to popularise Swadeshi goods.

Aruna warned her sisters that a bitter struggle to free India lay before them and that every woman should be prepared for this struggle adding, "Our task is great and the time at our disposal is very short. We do not know what amount of sufferings and sacrifices are still needed for the liberation of the country. The women of India should be prepared to play their noble part in the coming struggle".

Aruna said she wanted them to remember Satyawati, who was the first woman to go to jail for the sake of her country. She said that she regretted that she and her co-workers had failed to collect one lakh of rupees required for the Satyawati Memorial Fund. She reminded the collectors that not a penny from the capitalists was to be accepted for this fund. Satyawati, said Aruna, had worked for the people so the people should contribute towards the building up of the Memorial. "This Memorial will keep her memory green, it will be a source of inspiration to us all, and the tale of her sufferings which this Memorial will always be relating, will sustain us in our exacting struggle to drive away the British from the soil of India—the chaste soil which their guilty feet have long enough desecrated".

#### TO THE STUDENTS

Aruna has always been popular with students. When she addressed the students of Delhi they were so much impressed by her speech that after the meeting they not only took a pledge to boycott foreign goods but about five hundred students decided to



launch a campaign in every street of Delhi to popularise Indian goods.

She expressed her appreciation of the part students had played in the August movement. They had, she said, left their schools and colleges and had plunged into the struggle whole-heartedly. She defined the students' role in 1942 as defiant and protesting and not revolutionary. Now was the time for them to organise on a sound revolutionary basis. The organization of the students would enable them to develop "resisting element" for the next struggle, therefore absolute efficiency in organisation was essential. The country, she said, wanted a body of trained and disciplined soldiers and not vague agitators.

#### HER OLD HOUSE RESTORED

It may be recalled that when Aruna was declared an absconder her house was attached by the Government and her Baby Austins had been auctioned. It was now announced that her house would be restored and the sale proceeds of the car would be handed over to her.

While addressing a meeting of the mill workers at Delhi Aruna asked them to unite and to stand by the Congress. She paid a tribute to the workers who had played a great part in India's struggle for freedom. She did not blame those workers who had not helped because she knew fully well that the Communists had set them on the wrong track. "Whenever we called upon the workers to strike, those agents of British Imperialism came forward with their slogan of, 'people's war' and tried to break the strike. It was an unmanly thing on their part to do as we were working from behind the scene and those betrayers of the great national cause were working in the open and could approach you individually. They succeeded in many places to persuade you to resume your work. I, for one, do not blame you but these henchmen of the foreign Government". She appealed to the workers to beware of the Communists and look to the Congress as their best friend

## 7. At the Feet of Gandhi

### ON ROUTE TO WARDHA

Gandhiji in response to Aruna's telegram asked her to see him at Wardha. She left Delhi on February 7, and according to the wishes of the Secretary of the Nagpur Congress Committee, stopped for some time at Nagpur. She received a hearty welcome at the railway station. Later, she addressed a public meeting where about 10,000 people were present and told them that they should be prepared for the final struggle for freedom and see that their country was free within one year. Speaking about the British Imperialism in India, she said that the villagers must first drive out the agents of the British Government, then their leaders would see that the Britishers quit India. Speaking as a participant in the 1942 movement, she declared that India even today was not a free nation.

"The Congress workers must penetrate into the villages to build up unit formations of the Indian National Army. An Azad Hind Government should be established in the villages, on the basis of this constitutional structure. The veterans of the Indian National Army should form the nucleus of an Azad Hind Army, establishing contacts with the masses of the people. In India we have to form a real and effective Azad Hind Government to shape our destiny and all those who praised Subhas Chandra Bose ought to work for this purpose zealously."

She added, Gandhiji's constructive programme had not been faithfully and earnestly carried out. If it had, it would have hastened the achievement of their objective of freedom. But people only raised slogans and shirked the responsibility of working. In-



stead of being ready to make sacrifices they passed their lives in comfort.

Referring to the British Government's attitude towards the acts of violence which were being committed against the Britishers she said the Indians would not yield to British threats. She said that Mahatma Gandhi alone could ask for an explanation from those who had diverted from the path of non-violence but Britishers had the right to talk of non-violence to Indian people.

Concluding Aruna said, "I am going to meet our leader Mahatma Gandhi at Sewagram and discuss with him all the doings of August 1942 movement. We shall also discuss preparation for the next final struggle for India's freedom".

### PRODIGAL ARUNA RETURNS

It was after the evening prayers that Aruna met Gandhiji. The scene reminded one of the return of the prodigal son. For more than one hour she related to him all that she had been doing during her underground life. As Gandhiji wanted to have further talk with her he asked her to prolong her stay by two days.

On the following day Aruna addressed a meeting at Wardha. Wardha, it might be mentioned, was the home town of Seth Jamna Lal Bajaj and he had offered the village of Sewagram to Mahatma Gandhi for building his *Ashram*. Aruna paid glowing tributes to the memory of the Seth who had given Gandhiji a chain of his bungalows for Congress work such as Indian Village Industries, the All India Spinners Association and a host of others.

Not only had he given money, said Aruna, but he had even sacrificed his life for the Congress. Many a time he had courted imprisonment and during his last imprisonment he had fallen so ill that even after his release he could not recover. "This princely hearted Seth was a true soldier in the fight for freedom and was a faithful follower of Mahatma Gandhi who regarded him as one of his trusted colleagues. He was not only the maker of Wardha, but also of modern India."

Turning to Mahatma Gandhi Aruna said: "He is the man who has made women fearless and bold. It is he who has given the women of India an opportunity to play their part in liberating

India. He is truly the father of the Indian nation and it is of one and all to march under his banner".

When Aruna on her second meeting with Mahatma Gandhi discussed the ways and means for the re-organisation of the Congress while Gandhiji instructed her about the future Congress work. Discussing the food situation, Aruna said that the people would not face the famine and die as the people of Bengal did in 1943.

Before leaving Wardha Aruna addressed a large gathering. She spoke to them about the famine which was fast approaching and suggested that the Congress should organise "grain banks" in every village. Continuing she said, "The Quit India demand becomes a live issue again. The impending threat of mass deaths due to food shortage is the result of callous indifference on the part of the ruling power. The Bengal famine taught it nothing.

"The simulated concern of Lord Wavell during the Bengal famine notwithstanding scarcity on a vast scale looms ahead. Let us not await death with folded hands. Let us tell every peasant that he is the master of his grain and that this alien Government has no right to snatch away his produce.

"We must here and now organise ourselves and create the requisite authority for challenging the right of Lord Wavell's administration to save India." She said, "The Congress could, if it wanted, set itself as a parallel authority in the country. By co-operation with the British Government in such moments of national crisis we merely strengthen its hold.

"Remember the slogan of 1942. 'Fight for food is the fight for freedom'. Not a grain to feed the rulers, not a pie for the British goods."

Cryptically said Aruna, "Without food one cannot live to fight, hence people should fight to live".



## HUSY ARUNA

Aruna had a special fascination for the people of Bombay. When on the day of her arrival in the town she was requested for an address she readily agreed. A reception was accorded to her by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. She spoke to the crowd for more than one hour. Recalling her underground life Aruna said that they had resolved on the day the Congress Committee adopted the Quit India resolution to continue the struggle for the freedom of the country. She declared, "Even though the Congress might not have officially sponsored the Quit India movement we believed that the Congress had given the call and we readily responded to it". Continuing she said, "We might have faltered on the path and we might have been caught by the police and locked up behind bars, but the battle for freedom continued. Forty crores of Indians who had risen in revolt were determined to free our country from the fetters of British Imperialism. If our leaders who could guide us in our freedom movement were taken away from the people and locked up inside the cells, the only possible means of continuing the struggle was by some of us going underground. Our only aim was to see the country liberated and the British rule in our country completely liquidated".

Referring to the British Government's move in making an offer of a National Government and a Constituent Assembly, Aruna warned the people that the British Government was preparing a new trap to keep their hold on India intact. She said that the British Government had realised that they had to change their tactics in dealing with the people of India. It therefore held out this bait to our leaders to bypass the main demand of freedom to this country. "Our leaders think," she said, "that freedom for our country is soon coming and the British Government is earnest in granting freedom to our country". Aruna stated that she, however, had no faith in the bona fides of the British Government.

While in Bombay, Aruna was a very busy person. She had to meet her old acquaintances, discuss the future plans of work and the problems facing India with her co-workers, and address various organizations who pressed her for a message. Aruna told the students of Bombay that it was the duty of those who had political education to impart it to the kisans and workers and thereby make them fit and ready for the country's fight for freedom. Re-

## 8. Aruna Argues with Gandhi

### DUTY FIRST

Aruna, who had become very weak in health instead of taking rest and spending some quiet time with her husband whose health was also deteriorating, felt it her duty to devote whatever time she could spare to her country. She knew the spectre of famine was looming over the face of India, there was unrest among the labourers, then the election campaign on behalf of the Congress had to be conducted. So Aruna, after considering all these points decided to tour the whole of India. Wherever Aruna went she attracted big crowds.

### HINDU-MUSLIM PROBLEM A FARCE

Speaking of the Hindu-Muslim problem in India, Aruna told the people of Nagpur: "I do not concede such a thing as a Hindu-Muslim problem. All this is a farce. What I find", she said, "is a fight among a certain section of the people for loaves and fishes of office".

It may be recalled that the Congress had tried its best to come to terms with the League leaders and Aruna had always cried halt to the Congress policy of appeasement. And now once again she told her elders that the Congress appeal to the Muslims should be made to the Muslim masses instead of the Muslim leaders and she expressed her fullest confidence that such an appeal when made would get great response.



ferring to Pandit Nehru's declaration that preparations of a psychological nature were necessary, she said that even though she agreed with him, she felt that something more in the nature of positive action was essential. Emphatically she declared, "We have no place today for mere intellectuals. We want practical people who can carry the message of independence throughout the whole length and breadth of the country".

Some students asked Aruna to address them in English because their knowledge of Hindustani was very meagre. Expressing her inability to do so, Aruna said: "Hindustani being our national language is the language which can give weight to our ideal of independence and I have promised Gandhiji that in Hindustani alone shall I address gatherings".

#### ADVICE TO R.I.N. RATINGS

The respect the people of India had for Aruna was revealed when the Indian naval ratings went on strike. Their demands which they had placed before their authorities having been refused they stood up in revolt and challenged the British authorities to shoot them if they dared. This was the first time that the Indian seamen had revolted against the discriminatory treatment meted out to the Indians in comparison to that of the white-skinned seamen. The strikers after three days of looting shops, smashing offices and setting fire to military trucks and trains placed their faith and trust in the hands of the Indian leaders, so that something might be done for them. Aruna who was also approached gave them her advice in the following words:

"Almost 15,000 naval ratings of the R.I.N. have struck work and refused to eat canteen food since Sunday evening. Their demands are essentially legitimate. They have insisted that the inequalities in the scale of pay, allowances and food between the R.I.N. and R.N. should cease.

"They have protested against the appointment of British officers and their insulting and unsufferable behaviour towards the Indian personnel in the navy. These service conditions and economic demands are quite naturally affected by the high tension political climate of today. At least young Indians in the services are no longer prepared to submit sheepishly to the hectoring and swearing of their British rulers.

"Be that as it may, I earnestly hope that the strikers will not permit unco-ordinated and spontaneous action to mar the otherwise disciplined move they have made for the removal of their grievances. Solidarity and discipline are the first essentials of success in all collective action of this nature. They must formulate their demands precisely and conduct their struggle with dignity. Care should be taken to eschew injury to person or property in this action. The naval ratings must conduct negotiations through their respective ship committees *viz.*, their Central Naval Strike Committee.

"The naval authorities should note that at the instance of the representatives of the strikers I am giving this advice. I am sure that the Congress, the Labour and the Student Organisation of Bombay will extend their moral support to their legitimate demands.

"It is the first occasion when such an overwhelming number of the Indian seamen have undertaken collective action with such effects. Firmness, discipline and unity on the part of the strikers and the pressure of public opinion should result in a successful conclusion of this spontaneous strike".

The strike situation, however, worsened. A complete *hartal* was observed in Bombay and the mill hands of Bombay struck work as a mark of sympathy with the naval ratings. The Bombay police and military had to resort to firing to disperse the violent mobs that paraded the streets. In fact the whole city of Bombay presented an ugly picture.

Realising that the situation was out of control, Aruna sent a telegram to Pandit Nehru asking him to visit Bombay and thus save the naval strike from heading towards a climax. The telegram ran—"Naval strike tense. Situation serious climaxing to grim close. You alone can control and avoid tragedy. Request your immediate presence in Bombay".

Pandit Nehru at that time was in Garhwal conducting the election campaign and was completely cut off from the newspaper world. It was only when he returned to Allahabad that he learnt about the serious developments in Bombay. He immediately cancelled his election engagements and went straight to Bombay.

Aruna in the meantime went to Poona to meet Gandhiji. She had a ninety-minute talk with him about the R.I.N. ratings.



Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister, broadcast a stern warning to the mutineers to surrender unconditionally. He had further ordered the British warships to proceed to Bombay and bombard the ships under the control of the mutineers if they refused to surrender. But the arrival of the British warships changed the complexion of the situation. So far as the mutineers were concerned they were prepared to die fighting. But knowing too well that the repercussions of this open fight will be terrible and far-reaching in the Indo-British relations they approached Sardar Patel and he gave them the following advice.

"In the present unfortunate circumstances that have developed the advice of the Congress to the R.I.N. ratings is to lay down arms and to go through the formality of a surrender which has been asked for.

"The Congress will do its level best to see that there is no victimisation and the legitimate demands of the naval ratings are accepted as soon as possible. There is considerable tension all over the city and there has been loss of life and property.

"There is also considerable strain, both on the naval ratings as well as on the authorities. While fully appreciating their spirit and courage and also having full sympathy in their present difficulties, the best advice that the Congress can give them, in the present circumstances, is to end the tension immediately. This advice is in the interests of all concerned."

#### GANDHI-ARUNA CONTROVERSY

The R.I.N. ratings listened to the advice of the Congress leaders and surrendered unconditionally. The terrible anarchy that had prevailed in Bombay pained Mahatma Gandhi. For thirty years he had been preaching non-violence and now he found that there were violent tendencies in the minds of people. He expressed his feelings in the following statement:

"I have followed the events now happening in India with painful interest. This mutiny in the navy and what is following is not, in any sense of the term, non-violent action.

"Inasmuch as a single person is compelled to shout Jai Hind or any popular slogan, a nail is driven into the coffin of *Swaraj* in terms of the dumb millions of India. Destruction of churches and

the like is not the way to *Swaraj* as defined by the Congress. Looting and burning of tramcars and other property, insulting and injuring Europeans, is not non-violence of the Congress type, much less mine, if and insofar as it may be different from the Congress.

"Let the known and unknown leaders of this thoughtless orgy of violence know what they are doing and then follow their bent. Let it not be said that India of the Congress spoke to the world of winning *Swaraj* through non-violent action and belied her word in action and that too at the most critical period in her life.

"I have deliberately used the adjective thoughtless, for there is such a thing as thoughtful violent action. What I see happening now is not thoughtful.

"If the Indian members of the navy know and appreciate the way of non-violent resistance it can be dignified, manly and wholly effective, if it is corporate. For the individual it always is. Why should they continue to serve if service is humiliating for them or India? Action like this I have called non-violent non-co-operation. As it is, they are setting a bad and unbecoming example for India.

"A combination between Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy and will lead to and probably is a preparation for mutual violence, bad for India and the world.

"The rulers had declared to quit in favour of Indian rule. Let the action be not delayed by a moment because of the exhibition of distressful unrest which has been lying hidden in the breast. Their might is unquestioned. Its use beyond the bare requirements will be unworthy and even wicked if it is made to suppress the people or a portion of them. The latter have been far too long under the foreign rule."

Aruna after reading this, issued a rejoinder refuting Gandhiji's statement and the Mahatma gave the following reply:

"I congratulate Shrimati Aruna Asaf Ali on her courageous refutation of my statement on the happenings of Bombay. Except for the fact that she represents not only herself but also a fairly large body of underground workers, I would not have noticed her refutation only because she is a daughter of mine—not less so because not born to me or because she is a rebel.



"I had the pleasure of meeting her on several occasions while she was underground. I admired her bravery, resourcefulness and burning love of the country. But my admiration stopped there. I did not like her being underground. I do not appreciate any underground activity. I know that millions cannot go underground. Millions need not.

"A select few may have the fancy that they will bring *Swaraj* to millions by secretly directing their activity. Will this not be spoon-feeding? Only open challenge and open activity is for all to follow. Real *Swaraj* must be felt by all man, woman and child. Labour for that consummation is true revolution. India has become a pattern for all exploited races of the earth because India's has been an open unarmed effort which demands sacrifice from all without inflicting injury on the usurper. The millions in India would not have awakened but for the open unarmed struggle. Every deviation from the straight path has meant a temporary arrest of the evolutionary revolution, I do not read 1942 events as does the brave lady. It was good that the people rose spontaneously. It was bad that some or many resorted to violence. It makes no difference that Shri Kishorelal Mashruwala, Kaka Saheb and other workers, in their impassioned zeal for the moment misinterpreted non-violence. That they did so, only shows how delicate an instrument non-violence is. My analogy is not meant to cast any reflection on any person. Everyone acted as he or she thought best. Supineness in the face of overwhelmingly organized violence would have meant cowardice. I would be weak and wrong if I failed to give my estimate of the doings of 1942.

"Aruna would rather unite Hindus and Muslims at the barricade than on the constitutional front. Even in terms of violence, this is a misleading proposition. If the union at the barricade is honest, there must be union also at the constitutional front. Fighters do not always live at the barricade. They are too wise to commit suicide. The barricade life has always to be followed by the constitutional. That front is not a taboo for ever. Emphatically it betrays want of foresight to disbelieve British declarations and precipitate a quarrel in anticipation. Is the official deputation coming to deceive a great nation? It is neither manly nor womanly to think so. What would be lost by waiting? Let the official deputation prove for the last time that British declarations are unreliable. The nation will gain by trusting. The deceiver loses when

there is correct response from the deceived.

"Let us face facts. The coming Mission is, claimed to be, a friendly mission, entertaining the hope that they will discover a constitutional method of delivery. But the problem is knotty, probably the knottiest that has ever confronted statesmen. It is probable that the mission will put forth an insoluble conundrum. So much the worse for them.

"If they are intent upon finding an honest way out of the difficulties of their own creation, I have no doubt there is a way. But the nation too has to play the game. If it does, the barricade must be left aside at least for the time being. I appeal to Aruna and her friends to make wise use of the power their bravery and sacrifice has given them.

"It is a matter of great relief that the ratings have listened to Hardar Patel's advice to surrender. They have not surrendered their honour. So far as I can see, in resorting to mutiny, they were badly advised. If it was for grievance, fancied or real, they would have waited for the guidance and intervention of political leaders of their choice. If they mutinied for the freedom of India, they were doubly wrong. They could not do so without a call from a prepared revolutionary party. They were thoughtless and ignorant if they believed that by their might, they would deliver India from foreign domination.

"Aruna was right when she said that the fighters this time showed grit as never before. But grit becomes foolhardiness when it is untimely and suicidal as this was.

"She is entitled to say that the people 'are not interested in the ethics of violence or non-violence but the people are very much interested in knowing the way which will bring freedom to the masses—violence or non-violence'.

"The people have, however imperfectly, hitherto gone the way of non-violence. Aruna and her comrades have to ask themselves everytime whether the non-violent way has or has not raised India from her slumber of ages and created in them a yearning, very vague perhaps, for *Swaraj*. There is, in my opinion, only one answer.

"There are other passages in Shrimati Aruna's statement which, as it appears to me, betray confusion of thought. But their



treatment can wait.

"Needless to say that I have dealt with the message believing to represent her opinion. If it does not, I apologise to her in advance. My argument, however, is not affected, even if it is found that the reporter had not correctly interpreted her. For my argument is, after all, impersonal and directed only to the public which are calculated to mislead the public irrespective of the authorship".

## INDONESIAN DAY

Aruna Asaf Ali presided over the Indonesian National Day meeting organised by the Indonesian Students Committee in India Chowpatty. In her short speech Aruna said that she was sorry the Indians could send mere words of sympathy to their valiant Indonesian brethren. India could best help Indonesia by freeing herself. She revealed that the Indonesian freedom movement was started by a woman—Miss Kartini. Today, the Indonesians have their own republic under the leadership of Dr. Soekarno.

## BACK TO BENGAL

The situation in Bombay having eased as a result of the unconditional surrender by the R.I.N. ratings, Aruna decided to leave Calcutta as she had promised the people of Bengal that she would revisit their province as soon as she was free.

At the Howrah Railway Station Aruna was garlanded on behalf of the B.P.C.C., B.P.S.C. Socialist Association, E.I. Railwaymen's Union, Rubber Factory Workers Union and Chatkal Mazdoor Union. From the station she drove direct to Mr. Manubhai Bhimani's residence to condole with Mr. Bhimani's old parents who were in bereavement owing to the death of their son-in-law.

On the following day Aruna addressed a mammoth meeting of railway workers at the Mogul Bagan Maidan which was presided over by Professor Humayun Kabir.

Aruna in the course of her speech told them that strike was indeed a very effective weapon in the hands of the railway workers who were discontented because their legitimate demands had not been fulfilled. But in order to win their battle they needed unflin-

solidarity and organization.

Aruna warned them that the British Government would not hesitate to use force on the railway workers to break their morale. But no matter what came from them it was for the railwaymen to demonstrate through their solidarity, organization and iron-determination that they were not to surrender until their cause triumphed.

She appealed to the railway workers to place their grievances before the Congress Working Committee prior to resorting to hartal just as the Bombay ratings had done.

In the end Aruna called upon the workers to stand by the Congress and to strengthen the great patriotic organization.

## CALL FROM AZAD

Aruna had originally planned to tour Bengal and Assam extensively, but on receiving a telegram from Maulana Azad asking her to proceed to Delhi she cancelled her Chittagong Students Conference programme and also curtailed her Assam tour.

She spoke to the people of Gauhati (Assam) about the policy the Congress ministers should follow during their tenure of office. She said that they should bear in mind that the Quit India issue at which the elections were fought will not have been carried out by the British bureaucracy, military and the vested interests are entrenched everywhere.

Referring to Gandhiji's faith in office acceptance Aruna said, "This faith was a revolutionary factor. Gandhiji had the hope that a constructive programme can receive an impetus by the Congress ministries working it. This faith, if it was justified, must mean giving the programme a practical shape as the country was waiting the unfolding of that plan".

She expressed her thought that the Congress Ministry in Assam would not be anything different from the Saadulla Cabinet in Section 93 Administration.

She asked the Congress ministers to win the Muslim hearts by action and for the removal of hatred by which the League leadership was functioning.



## LEAGUERS MOB ARUNA

At a wayside railway station a large crowd of Muslim Leaguers mobbed Aruna with lathis and brickbats. The angry mob demanded Pakistan from her and although the Leaguers were very provocative Aruna remained unruffled and quietly listened to all that they had to say. After they had finished Aruna told the Leaguers that they should go to the British for wresting Pakistan. She said, "Who am I to give you Pakistan? I am but a humble servant of the nation. I have no power in my hands to make a gift of anything to anybody. The power is in the hands of the British Government".

Then the crowd asked her to join the Muslim League. Aruna frankly refused. She added that she would not join the Muslim League because of the Nizamuddin Ministry's misdeeds, involving deaths not only of Hindus but also of millions of Muslims.

After her hurried tour of Assam, Aruna returned to Calcutta and after a few days left for Delhi by air. Although Mr Jinnah happened to be travelling by the same plane, he did not exchange a word with Aruna.

## ARUNA MEETS AZAD

Immediately after her arrival in Delhi Aruna had a long talk with the Congress president. After the talk she told the pressmen, "I told the Congress president that the ratings' strike was spontaneous. In seeking redress of their grievances by resorting to strike and by wanting Congress intervention they had overstepped the convention and regulations governing the armed services. But in view of the war-to-peace time transition problems prevalent in the services and the disturbed political atmosphere, the authorities would have been well advised to take advantage of Sardar Patel's role as a mediator and not come out with provocative action. I was summoned by the Congress President to Delhi, in order to give him an eyewitness account of the R.I.N. strike and subsequent happenings in Bombay and elsewhere. I hope that only such a technical step will be taken against the R.I.N. ratings as may be necessary to satisfy the regulations and formalities". Concluding Aruna said "The navy in free India with its own government would not have occasion to resort to mutiny for removal of service

grievances and racial discrimination".

## NONE OF CONTENTION

Mahatma Gandhi in an article in the *Harijan* entitled "Conflict of Ideas" answered the criticism of Aruna on his advice to R.I.N. ratings asking them to resign if their conditions were humiliating. Aruna in reply to the statement of Gandhiji had said that if the R.I.N. ratings resigned they would have to give up their own means of livelihood. Moreover, they were fighting for principles. If they resigned now there would be hundreds, in these days of unemployment, to take their place who would be subject to the same discriminatory treatment and the R.I.N. ratings would not have achieved anything. She felt that the Congressmen who were themselves going to the legislatures could not afford to ask the ratings to give up their jobs.

Mahatma Gandhi gave the following reply to this trend of argument.

"The first principle of non-violent action propounded in the Congress resolution of 1920 at its special session in Calcutta under the presidency of the late Lala Lajpat Rai is non-cooperation with everything humiliating. It must be remembered that the R.I.N. was founded not for the benefit of the ruled. The men went with their eyes open. Discrimination stares one in the face. It cannot be avoided if one enters the service which is frankly organised to keep India under subjection. One way, one ought to try to mend under the conditions. That is possible only up to a point. That cannot be achieved through mutiny. Mutiny may conceivably succeed, but the success can only avail the mutineers and their kin, not the whole of India. And the lesson would be a bad inheritance.

"Discipline will be at least as necessary under *Swaraj* as it is now. India under successful mutineers would be cut up into warring factions exhausted by the internecine strife.

"India of the Congress has made little headway in the appreciation of the fight for *Swaraj* if it is true that hundreds would take their places if the present ratings resigned in pursuance of their campaign against humiliation. Can we have *Swaraj* for the masses if we are so degraded that hundreds of us are ready to swallow hu-



miliation even to the extent of taking the places of humiliated fellowmen? The very thought is unworthy of Congressmen and that too at the moment when *Swaraj* is believed to be within sight.

"Those who hold that enlistment in the R.I.N. is their only means of livelihood must have a very poor opinion of themselves. A soldier's is a hard life. He is disciplined to work in co-operation and trained to work with the pickaxe and the spade. Such a one will disdain to think that apart from soldiering he has no means of livelihood. We have poor opinion of soldiers if we think that they cannot earn their bread by the sweat of the brow. A labourer is any day worthy of his hire. What is, however, true is that a soldier out of his calling will lack the glamour and the amenities provided for him. We have wasted precious twenty-five years if we have not stripped the profession of killing and destroying of the thick coat of varnish that has covered it for so long.

"Aruna Asaf Ali has been reported to have said that the ratings would have gained nothing by resigning. Well, they would have gained honour and dignity if they had manfully given up their jobs and taught the citizens of Bombay the way to save honour and dignity and they would have spared Bombay the senseless destruction of life, property and very precious foodstuffs. Surely this would have been an achievement not quite beneath notice.

"Congressmen going to the legislatures for conserving the honour and liberty of the country is not the same as ratings serving for their livelihood with the possibility of being used against their own countrymen and their liberty. Congressmen who go to the legislatures are representatives elected by their voters and they go even if it is only to prevent those from going who will misrepresent their voters. Going to the legislatures may be altogether bad, but there can be no such comparison as has been just adverted to."

## 9. Itinerant Aruna

### PUNJAB—AT LAST

The Punjabis who are full of vitality and dynamic energy and are always ready for reckless, immediate action have a special attraction for young and rising leaders. Pandit Nehru, the ambassador of young India, had remarked on one of his visits to Lahore that the gathering he had addressed in the capital of the Punjab was the largest that he had ever seen in his life.

Since the day of her emergence from the underground life Aruna had been pelted with requests from her co-workers of Punjab to visit their province. In spite of her best efforts she could not go to Lahore earlier than in the last week of March. On her way to Lahore at the Ambala Railway Station she was given a meeting reception. At night she addressed a meeting held under the auspices of the Students' Congress. Lady Congress volunteers presented a guard of honour with tri-colour flags. A number of purses and gold bangles were presented to her.

Aruna told her audience that Punjab was fortunate that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had given the people the great gift of I.N.A. and that it was the bounden duty of the Punjabis to make the best use of this unique gift. The personnel of the I.N.A., she advised, should be absorbed in the Congress and taken by the Congress committees. Naming the first three heroes of the Azad Hind Fauj, Aruna said, "Shah Nawaz, Dhillon and Sehgal should not waste their time in making speeches but they should get busy in bringing about perfect unity and harmony in the province. These men have lived in an atmosphere of unity of thought and unity of action. The inspired leadership of Netaji brought this



miracle into being. It is for these people to tell their countrymen to by what means and methods this unity is achieved. The first and foremost duty of these three symbols of courage, sacrifice and patriotism is to unite the people of this country and towards the end they must channelise all their energies".

At Chheharta, an important industrial colony, about five miles from Amritsar, Aruna addressed a largely attended meeting. Painfully, Aruna referred to the failure of August movement in the Punjab. "The Punjabis", said Aruna, "were ready for the action. But their willingness and enthusiasm could not be put into practice because of the weak leadership of the Congress in the Punjab. I am sure if the leaders had given the call the Punjabis would have responded in the same brave way as did the masses in other provinces. Besides, it must not be forgotten that the Communists were responsible for the failure of the movement. They had turned traitors and had started helping the British war effort".

Revealing a secret of her underground activities, Aruna said that at one time she was put in charge of the Punjab, N.W.F. and Sind zone for the organisation of work. But she and her comrades found it difficult to work here because of the above mentioned reasons.

#### TRIBUTES TO BHAGAT SINGH

On March 24, Aruna arrived in Lahore. She met the Congress Socialist leaders and had long talks with them. Then she addressed a large body of Congress, Congress Socialist and Student workers at the Bradlaugh Hall. She received a great ovation as she entered the hall. Aruna paid glowing tributes to the memory of Bhagat Singh. "It was Sardar Bhagat Singh," said Aruna, "who had taught the people the revolutionary spirit. He was one of the most fearless people that India has produced. He did not want to escape the gallows by giving an undertaking that he did not believe in violence. He was an utterly truthful person. The work which Bhagat Singh had started for India's freedom was yet incomplete. More than twenty years have passed but the goal which he sacrificed his life had not yet been reached, though it is a mission which inspires us all in our efforts. It is the duty of each one of us to strive every fibre of our nerves for the attainment of that goal."

the goal—the goal that promises the liberation of our down-trodden masses....the goal that will usher in an era of freedom from want and fear". Referring to the formation of the Coalition Ministry in the Punjab, Aruna said that it was a very diplomatic move on the part of the Congress. She asked the people to forget the past policy and the atrocities committed by Sir Khizar Hayat at the instance of the British Government. The Coalition Ministry had to face two enemies....the British Government and the Muslim League. The Ministry should put such a programme which would make the Punjab Muslims feel that it was the Congress which was really their well-wisher and not the Muslim League.

#### COMMUNISTS EXPOSED

It may be recalled that Aruna had always criticised the attitude of Communists and had spoken against them in all her speeches. In one of her speeches she had said, "While the country was burning in this gigantic life and death struggle, the Communists, who pretend to be revolutionaries, were siding with the British to strengthen their imperialist hold. They are nothing else but traitors. These Communists betrayed the country at a moment of grave need. They tried to mislead the country by raising the false and meaningless slogan of people's war... But I am glad that the country has now realised their real character. All their efforts to explain their anti-national thesis of 'people's war' has miserably failed as it was expected to fail".

In a speech delivered at the Howrah Railway Station Aruna had made serious allegations against the Communist workers. She alleged that some volunteers who advised peasants to seize food during the last Bengal famine had been arrested by the police on information supplied by the Communists.

In another speech Aruna had vehemently condemned the Indian Communists for the statements they had made against Netaji Subhas Bose, adding, "Our so-called patriots had the effrontery to call him a puppet in the hands of the Japanese. And they had the barefacedness to denounce him as the 'advance guard of Tojo'. There was not a derogatory adjective that they did not use against the Indian National Army which had unleashed the sword from the frontiers of India to drive the British out. The brave men of



the Azad Hind Fauj suffered and suffered so that from the womb of their sufferings the babe of Indian freedom may be born. Who does not know that there were suicide squads in the I.N.A., the members of which unit carried dynamite to blow up the enemy tanks. They carried death around their waists. They, for the honour of Mother India, challenged the will of God in fixing the hour of their death.

"It is a matter of positive shame that such fearless sons of India were damned by the Communists as traitors. It is not the soldiers of the I.N.A. who were traitors, but the Communists who maligned them and those mercenary and begging officers and soldiers who resisted them when they set their foot on the sacred soil of India.

"The soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj are like jewels worthy to adorn the neck of Mother India and all those Indians who stood in their way, whether in the front-line or in the rear, are like the stones to be thrown into the dust bin".

About the recent change in the policy of the Communists towards the British Government, Aruna said, "Times have changed now. Russia, the godfather of our Indian Communists has now become once again hostile to Britain. There is a clash of interests between Russia and Britain and how can our patriots side with Britain when Russia is working against that country. These Communists today are thinking in terms of struggle and marshalling their forces against the Congress. I want my countrymen to be aware of their machinations". And now once again she warned the people of Lahore that "the Communists are enemies at home. Beware of them. They betrayed the revolutionary forces in 1942".

#### CABINET MISSION IN INDIA

When the British Cabinet Delegation arrived in India, Delhi became the centre of political activities. All the Congress leaders flocked to Delhi to see for themselves the important negotiations that were going to take place. Aruna also returned to Delhi as she wanted to watch the political drama closely. Besides, Maulana Azad had decided to stay at Asaf Ali's residence so she had to look after the comfort of the Maulana whose health since his release from the Ahmednagar jail had not been too good. Although Aruna

had to entertain the members of the Working Committee who held their meetings at her house occasionally, she never neglected her own party work. She wrote articles for the party paper called *Janata* every week. During the Tripartite Conference she went to Bhopal for a few days.

The Congress Socialist Party, ever since the official announcement by Lord Pethic Lawrence that a Cabinet delegation was coming to India to negotiate with the leaders of Indian opinion for the transference of power to India, had been severely criticising this political mission. Aruna and her party felt that the Cabinet Delegation was coming to India just to gain time and to create further and greater differences among the political parties in India.

Aruna had stated that the British Cabinet Delegation had not come to deliver freedom to India but to play the mediator between the Congress and the League. The British had created the so-called differences and they were still trying to exploit them.

#### OBJECT THE PROPOSALS

When the Congress Working Committee in its resolution dated May 24, 1946 issued from Delhi rejected the short-term proposals for an interim Government, Aruna expressed her satisfaction at the rejection and dissatisfaction at the acceptance of long-term proposals. She said that the acceptance of the Constituent Assembly scheme foreshadowed many dangers. As the Constituent Assembly was far from the original idea of such an Assembly, it fell short of their aspirations. She maintained that the Constituent Assembly being a creation of the British it could never bring them freedom for which they had been fighting. Although the British Government had promised to accept the Constitution drawn up by the Constituent Assembly it would, nevertheless, be pulling wires in such a manner as not to allow the Indians to frame a Constitution which will be in consonance with the wishes of the Indian people. She added that there were bound to be differences of opinion between the Congress and the League during the process of Constitution making. In such a case the contending parties will have to go to the British Government for the settlement of their rival claims. She added that the Constituent Assembly could only succeed if it worked in a free atmosphere and that there could



be no free atmosphere in India so long as British troops continued to be stationed in India. The best course, according to Aruna, was to strengthen the Congress organization first and then to start a fight against the British Government and compel them to quit India.

At the A.I.C.C. session held at Bombay on July 7, 1946 to ratify the Congress Working Committee's Delhi decision, Aruna, who is a member of the All-India Congress Committee, opposed the resolution and said that the policy of the Working Committee, since the release of its members had been out of tune with the spirit of the Quit India resolution. The British power could only be overcome by a physical struggle and not by parleys and negotiations. Power to the people must come through their own struggle and strength.

If a referendum were taken today, she said, the people would resent the present policy of the Congress High Command as it was one of co-operation with the British. The Congress acceptance of a Constituent Assembly was a triumph for British post-war political plans. Realising that their old method of repression could no longer succeed in the changed circumstances, the British had changed their strategy, but they had not changed their hearts. The Working Committee had by its decision reduced itself to the status of the Muslim League which was the most reactionary political body in India.

The Congress demand of a Provisional Government had still to be met. The Constituent Assembly suggestion was not acceptable to people, because it was being summoned by the British power, before the people had captured the citadel of power.

Concluding her speech Aruna addressed Mahatma Gandhi and said, "We have listened to you all these years and it is now your duty to obey us".

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru while answering some of the criticism of the opposition, said he was pleased to hear the fiery speech one of the women members had made. It was indicative, he said, of the temper of Indian womanhood. He said more and more opportunities should be given to Indian women to participate in our public life.

## MILL WORKERS STRIKE

On July 8, about 15,000 workers of the Delhi Cloth Mills went on strike as a protest against the refusal of the mill authorities to recognise the Textile Mazdoor Sangh and their refusal to accept the arbitration of the Textile Mazdoor Sangh by an independent *Panchayat*. Yet the mill owner, Sir Sri Ram, declared that the strikers had no legitimate grievances. In a statement to the Press he had asserted that the strike was not the result of economic reasons but was prompted by political groups who were trying to gain control over the political workers. Aruna, who is the president of the Textile Mazdoor Sangh, contradicting his statement said that the Sangh enjoyed the overwhelming support of the general body of workers employed in the Delhi Cloth Mills and therefore the question of political rivalry did not arise. Moreover, if the strikers had no legitimate grievances the mill authorities should have had no objection in placing the demands before an arbitrator. The fact that they did not do so clearly proved that they were conscious of the strength of the labour's case. After fifteen days of strike Mr. Asaf Ali, president of the Delhi Provincial Congress Committee, intervened in the matter. The result was that the mill owner, Sir Sri Ram, recognised the Sangh and agreed to refer the dispute to arbitration. Aruna, the President of the Sangh, called off the strike on July 22.

Aruna Asaf Ali with her moving speech had roused the ardent fervour of independence in the minds of many a youth. She with her message of courage, defiance and action had gained popularity in the student world.

## A TRAGIC INCIDENT

During her tour of Sind, Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali visited Shikarpur. A 16-year old lad named Ali Gohar Brohi was eager to see Aruna but his elder brothers despite his requests, would not take him to the public meeting which she was to address. Ali Gohar, however, managed to reach the place of the meeting. Being unable to get near enough to the dais, Ali Gohar climbed up a high tree and saw Aruna. The branch of the tree on which he was sitting suddenly gave way and Brohi fell down and was seriously injured. When Aruna heard the story she visited the hospital and was visibly



moved by the youth's enthusiasm. The boy died the same evening.

## IN MADRAS

Aruna's admirers in Bombay presented her with a purse of over Rs. 1,00,000 as a mark of appreciation of her services to the country.

In the last week of August Aruna arrived in Madras and spent twenty-one days touring the whole province. During her one-day visit to Madras she had a very busy programme. First of all she had to perform the opening ceremony of a reading room in honour of Jaya Prakash Narayan. Then she visited the exhibition of I.N.A. achievements and addressed the inevitable public meeting. The crowd consisted mostly of railway workers and students. Aruna told them that the Congress should mobilise labour within its ranks if the country were to be purged of strikes and labour unrest. She continued, "All talk of a Kisan and Mazdoor Raj sounded so hollow because the Congress had not so far enlisted labour and integrated its cause within the Congress policy".

Even the 1942 movement, said Aruna, did not prove of any immediate use because there was no synthesis between the Congress and the labour movement. It was therefore high time that the Congress enlisted labour if only to see that it was not misled by "extraneous forces and organizations".

## RESOLUTION OPPOSED

At the A.I.C.C session held at Meerut on November 22, 1946 "the social butterfly" had developed into a serious and a sober woman. She walked about the *pandal*, impatient to see India free. She was seen arguing with many Congress leaders but her brow every time relaxed with a smile.

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya warned this "impatient patriot," "We are on the turning corner and the safety rule lays down that at the turning corner every motorist must drive slowly and be ready to apply brakes at a second's notice".

In the course of the A.I.C.C. proceedings Sardar Patel moved the second resolution of the session ratifying the Working Com-

mittee's and the A.I.C.C.'s decisions leading to the formation of the Interim Government. Referring to the Muslim League, he said, "What is being done today, is with the object of getting the Congress out of the Interim Government. We shall not allow ourselves to be caught in this net. We joined the Government with the full and firm determination to remain there. We have no intention of leaving it ourselves. The only way to make us leave it is to dissuade us or to convince us that continuance in it is futile".

Aruna opposed the resolution saying, "We should have met today to approve a complete abandonment of the path of compromise". She referred to Tilak, Gandhi and other personalities and said that revolutionaries like them had succeeded every time they came into conflict with orthodox Congressmen. Only recently had there been no victory of the revolutionaries.

Sardar Patel replying reiterated his conviction that the sword must be met by the sword. Mahatma Gandhi has said that it was better to use violence than to be a coward. Non-violence, said Sardar Patel, was a weapon which it was beyond the power of an ordinary man to use and, therefore, he urged the people to adopt violence in self-defence and only in self-defence or in defence of neighbours. He gave this advice because there was no Government at the Centre at present. The present Central Government during the transference of power was in a state of paralysis.

Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali opposing Sardar Patel's resolution said "the Interim National Government is neither national, nor a government, nor even will it prove to be interim".

When Asaf Ali was appointed Minister for Communications (war transport and railways) in September 1946, the gulf already existing between Aruna and her husband was widened. They were both heading for the same goal but each had chosen a different path. In December when Asaf Ali was asked to proceed to America as India's Ambassador, Aruna declared that she had no intention of leaving the country for some time and that she might go later on if she felt entitled to a holiday.

## IN LAHORE AGAIN

Aruna on her way to Kashmir, where she was going on a study tour, stopped for a day in Lahore. She was accorded a cordial re-



ception at the Lahore Railway Station. In the afternoon she addressed a Press Conference. Expressing her views on the formation of a Constituent Assembly, she said, "After all that has happened, my personal view is that the Constituent Assembly should assume full powers of a sovereign body and declare itself to be so. It should ignore the Parliament, become a Sovereign Statutory Authority and declare India's Constitution. Not only that. The interim (Provisional Government was the phrase used) Government should take over complete charge of the Government of the country and call upon the military and civil sections of the administration and the Indian people to declare their allegiance to the sovereign free Government of India—instead of owing their allegiance to the King".

She left for Jammu that same evening.

The Executive Committee of the Punjab Provincial Hindu Sabha which met on the following day adopted the following resolution unanimously.

"The Sabha views with great alarm that portion of the resolution moved in the Constituent Assembly which affects the Indian States because in its opinion this resolution would remove from the map of India only Hindu Ruler States and will not affect in any manner the Muslim Ruler States. The Sabha feels that the policy of the Congress towards Indian States is one-sided because on the one hand Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders encourage those elements in Jammu and Kashmir which are antagonistic to the Maharaja, on the other hand in Hyderabad the Hindu *satyagrahis* are asked to give up their agitation. The Sabha is also greatly perturbed over the visit of Mrs. Asaf Ali to Kashmir at the time when elections to Kashmir Assembly are being held and requests His Highness' Government not to swerve from its previous policy of not allowing outside elements to interfere in the affairs of the state. In the event of these outside elements persisting in their anti-State activities, the Sabha assures His Highness of its full support and help".

#### EXPERIENCES IN STATES

Aruna after seeing the state of affairs for herself in Jammu and other places in Kashmir, and having heard accounts of the doings

of what she described as, the "Royalist Party created by Premier Kak," advised the Kashmir National Conference workers to boycott completely the Kashmir Praja Sabha elections and to non-cooperate with the State authorities in that matter. She was shocked to find the manner in which official interference was going on in the election campaign. She felt that there would be no free and fair elections in the Kashmir valley because more than two hundred leaders and workers of the National Conference were in jail. "But I must say that the real villain of the peace is not even the Premier Kak but the political department which is using Kak as a puppet," said Aruna in a grim voice.

The members of the Royalist Party which had been organised under the Kak regime had planned to break up all the meetings Aruna was to address. In the course of a statement to the Press she said, "With abusive slogans, lathis, stones and knife attacks they sought to intimidate us. The magistrates on duty, policemen in uniform and police informers in plain clothes were directing them in a brazenfaced manner. But when the officials realised that neither threat of bodily injury nor personal insult would deter us from holding our meetings they thought that discretion was the better part of valour and retired".

By Aruna Asaf Ali's arrival in the State, Section 144 was imposed overnight in important centres and an official warning was given to the people not to participate in the meetings. In spite of all this Aruna addressed nine meetings.

She wanted to stay there for a longer time but she had to return to Delhi to keep up her other appointments. Besides, she had to report to the Congress High Command and also to Dr. Pattabhi, Working President of the All India States People's Conference, and take a trip to Hyderabad, Deccan.

On her return journey Aruna again stopped for a day in Lahore. While addressing a Press Conference at the Bradlaugh Hall, Aruna related all that she had seen and heard and pointed out that she merely wanted to suggest to the National Conference workers what she felt and it was for them to decide upon their future course of action. She, however, felt that under the circumstance which existed in the State then, it would be a miracle if even one of the nominees of the National Conference succeeded.

The staff of the North-Western Co-operative Society ap-



proached Aruna, the wife of the Railway Member of the Government of India, with their grievances. Aruna after listening to them issued a statement pointing out that the staff of the N. W. Railway Co-operative Credit Society, had not drawn their pay since October, 1946 as a protest against the non-payment of interest relief sanctioned by the general meeting of the shareholders of the Society in February, 1946. She expressed her hope that the higher authorities would look into the matter.

On January 21, Aruna arrived in Hyderabad Deccan by air. She was received at the airport by the local Congress leaders. In the evening she addressed a meeting of workers organised by the Hyderabad Mazdoor Sangh.

### STRONG-HEADED ARUNA

When it was officially announced that Asaf Ali, the first Indian Ambassador to America, would leave India by the end of January Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Aruna advising her to accompany her husband. Asaf Ali, however, postponed his departure to 7, February but strong-headed Aruna declared that she would join him in the United States in April.

She, however, left Delhi by the same plane as Asaf Ali and went with him as far as Karachi.

At Karachi while addressing a public meeting at Rambaugh recreation grounds she said, "Why am I not going to Washington with my husband? This is the question which confronts me wherever I go. In return I ask, is it possible for a mother to leave her ailing child? India is sick and passing through critical times. The signs are clear to those who can see. Gandhiji has buried himself in Noakhali for nothing. The final battle for India's freedom has yet to be fought. How can I leave my country without fulfilling my programme?"

---

## PART II

### TRAVEL TALK

---

Being a collection of articles from *Janata*, Delhi.

---



## 1. The Return

The still shots of a film got re-activated. It had stopped long back on the ninth morning of August 1942 at 4 a.m. but those were shots of a story that was contained; set scenes of life in comfortable studios, homes, work-a-day centres.

Often than desirable, the camera caught drawing rooms and salons. Again, funnily, came pictures of squalid homes, women at their spinning wheels or arguing the cause of women. But on that ninth morning at about eight (or was it half past?) a tear-gas bomb struck the projector, the reel lost mobility, the auditorium grew dark. Bewildered and groping I walked out.

When the gas bomb stung me first, I grew a little afraid, but when I saw a White policeman tear into strips the National Flag, I grew bold again. When the streets rang with pistol-shot sounds, I felt dazed. When I saw another woman inert and silent, I grew bold again.

But then, am I talking of "the Return"?

Why does the "walking out" fascinate or excite? Why wander the dim memory corridors lit only with the after-glow of conflagration, peopled by humanity in turmoil, littered with ghosts of sick destitutes? This nostalgia for heroic hours, days, and weeks, has in it high tension morbidity. Usually trapeze walking is, they say, a tense affair, very wearying for the nerves; only, for those who would rather not drag and shuffle, it brings elation. For such, it is hard not to loiter about in those forty months when the old order became blurred, dissolved, and the new lay gripped in the excitement of birth ordeals. For those who have been through it, the thought of a Return seems fantastic.



Returns are no easy journeys. Is the end a beginning? Was the beginning the end?

Why must the clamouring of the curious be satisfied? Why heed the call of the Social Man? Why return when the evils you set forth to conquer, remain; when fellow travellers may not join in the return journey? But hush! The irrational must not dare hold its own in the strong glare of the flood-lit stage.

You may tarry behind the scenes guiding and directing speed or action; you must not get lost in shifting stage-property and ringing the bell for the next act. Success or Failure—it is an enigma. But lookers-on insist on your bowing and scraping so that they may applaud. Hollow clapping and still more empty formalities, you must face these ("for the Cause") or else... or else, you will acquire insanity status !! And it is sanity that pays.

These thoughts, are they too morbid? Too charged with feeling revealing unbalance and reluctance to "face robustly" a "new situation"? If only the newness were new!

That was the first demand of journalists, of friends, of kin and kin on this return....! Also their second, their third...and the fourth demands! That which lies buried, one may not expose because it would mean exposing the wounds of a whole people.

Readjustment to the city-smug life of old appeared a betrayal, vulgarization of values. Living 'legally,' a violation of high laws.

All manner of inhibitions check one's first footsteps from conclusion to group life. Efforts at clinging to the purpose which motivated them, impulses towards an uninhibited life of struggle are the main urges. The distractions of group life, the routines of genteel social living, the re-mooring to a class I thought (how immaturely) would emerge cleansed of its false trappings.... the threaten to drag me back to the shell I walked out of. But the gods were kind. They whispered: "Courage". And they waved their magic wand and re-revealed in the eager faces of the peoples they massed around me, the faith I had clung to, these many months.

The light of affection, not the stare of the hero-worshipper that is what restored my confidence. The jostling and pushing and almost snatching gestures—not the ordered pathway for a 'Leader'

my footsteps as I walked amidst them—restored the bond I thought had snapped. The gods were even kinder.

The friendliness of the citizen-mass seemed cold and formal, when in the villages, rough and rustic hands after garlanding, snatched away the superfluous flowers and threw them back wild with glee. They rejoiced only in the defeat-of-the-police part of the story. The elders with tears in their voice rebuked me for refusing to remain garlanded during my talk—"this is a village, we want to see you just like that".

The village youths as they heard my story, rushed up with pledges promising work.

This was indeed an acceptance. I warmed up. They had broken through the barriers of my empty urbanity, my cultivated speech, my sophisticated home-spun. If they found it possible to respond to me no humanely, all was not lost. My faith in myself returned. I may yet be an instrument, a means for their ends? They had not disowned me though I returned empty handed. They had not questioned my sanctions, to speak and work in their name. Their seal of approval was not expressed in the set formal language of welcome. Their desire to be kindly and to entertain, meant just a glass of skimmed milk, not an invitation to a ceremonial feeding, associated with notabilities to the days or the 'Heroes' of hour. The chill within vanished. From a vague abstraction, the forty scores I had written and talked about, became a palpable reality. The incentive for vigorously exploring their needs, their joys and sufferings, grew keen. My sense of social responsibility grew sharp and the faltering will to live, faltered less. Charged with the meaning that these people attached to "living", the superficiality of my class setting became unimportant. With memories of their heroism to browse amidst, and ambitions linked with their future, life on the stage need not be stagey.

These may be but the first reaction and counter reaction. Who can say what shape thought and feeling will take when the journey grows longer and harder? I do not wish to know. I seek no anticipated end. The end and the beginning, let them change and interchange—fluid, luminous.

A sense of wholeness came back. The umbilical cord was re-linked, restored. I had returned.



subsequently.

The men who rode the storm of '42 are all of them gone with the receding wave. Everywhere the unknown men in great upheavals are never long remembered; the known few become symbols—for good or evil. Whether it is the devils that triumph or the angels, the few live, and the rest sink into race memory. But the few are recapitulated personifications. Through them recapitulation becomes easy. In them the history of the struggle lives; its anguish and achievements colour these human projections. Such residual elements again pose a question. Will they be like heavy sediment that, stir as you might, tends to settle below, or will they pour into the upper layers, restless and aerial?

My travel scheme had a purpose. It was meant to be a cover page. While waiting for the return of those whose co-operative efforts were needed to make another attempt to achieve the unfinished tasks, I meant not merely to mark time, I wanted to gain personal knowledge of men and women, their thoughts and capacities. But a change in the political temperature in the last ten days altered my plans. Restrictions on the liberties of some 'free' men were removed. Jail doors parted and other 'free men' walked out. The pressure of the people had worked where autocracy refused benevolent amnesty. Gandhiji triumphed in cases where it meant to remain unmoved.

"A P."

Arbuth Patwardhan's arrival in Bombay meant a great deal to those who had worked with him there. Tunnel life breeds loyalties that are cemented with hazardous experiences. Those who shared with him a common focus of danger, hard living, uncertainty, anonymity problems, bent towards purposeful striving, exhibited untrammelled joy at sight of him. The masses were even more excited when he addressed them. But minds, used to trick-work failed to adjust themselves as easily. Is this political-leader-looking man, the man who created the revolution in Maharashtra, framed its directives for cadres everywhere, drove a coach and four across his own cultivated past? Time's tests vary; mutability is part of the secret process of growth.

*Status quo* lives cannot return for those who rode the storm—or

## 2. Men Who Rode the Storm

WAITING for trains that run late is an irritating business. And most so, when instead of 'arriving any moment now' (enquiry office news) the period lengthens into indefiniteness. But when the train that one waits for is to unload warrior friends returning from the front, and instead of the advertised arrival time (imminent) it is not sighted for two months or more, patience is strained to cracking point.

Expecting the train of events that would restore to freedom captive and outlaw co-workers, I have been living perpetually on wayside stations and in travelling kit (literally and figuratively) from January 26 to April 5. Bureaucracy's obduracy relented only when it could unbend without 'losing face'. Autonomy-freedom gave popular governments the freedom to set at liberty prisoners and absconders of the Quit India fight. According to one view "under a government which imprisons any one unjustly, the true place for a just man is prison"; according to another—a vogue of '42 the "tyrannicides" of society ought never to fall into the tyrant's hands. We have since 1857 incarnated two passions. The love of country and the love of freedom. But a tender humanity, a religion that is humanism, has been grafted on to these by Gandhiji. Every fighter in the cause has attempted to better himself as an instrument under the influence of his purificatory drives. The urges to act as one thinks, to elevate thought to the super-personal level and thereby link action with other than self-regarding ends, has been his message from struggle to struggle led by Gandhiji. Indian manhood under his direction has withstood every challenge to it as well as it could. It surpassed expectation only once in recent history—and that was in August '42 and



is this a romantic expectation—a refusal to live on the plane of normality?

But in themselves the release of politicals mean little. It is only when they become 'issues' that they are significant.

#### "J.P." & "R.M.L."

Jaya Prakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia's friends were reconciled to their indefinite detention. Gandhiji pursued the matter in his own determined way. The salt law and political prisoners were minor issues for those engaged in resolving larger ones. Constantly aware of the relationship of the small to the big, he must have insisted vehemently and that was why J.P. and R.M.L. came out of Agra Jail on the 11th April.

Crowds have never shown much respect for order anywhere and when the mood of elation is high it becomes unrestrained. The discipline of emotions is a tall order for even the elect. They received J.P. the legend hero who scaled prison walls to help fighters for freedom in November '42 with tumultuous affection. Since his arrest J.P. was known to have suffered much. Today he has a sober look, a calm manner, traits that never deserted him but appear more pronounced today. There is much that is expected of him. After all the *ancien regime*, if it goes at all, will not mean Utopia ushered.

Those whose lives are nailed under poverty, ignorance and squalor will have to be transformed. What agencies will achieve this metamorphosis—that is a question that optimists have to face even though its answer shatters their smugness. But if incapable unbelievers in change-of-heart-freedom are proved right and British vested interests, have to be fought once again. Jaya Prakash and his companions Ram Manohar and Achyut will be expected to lay out before those who are pledged and enlisted soldiers, a plan and an organisation. Mass activation requires mass influence but that is not enough. A dynamic drive alone can make the inertia-ridden normal man plunge into recreative effort, heighten his social responsibility and create out of chaos, relationships based on absence of social injustice. Jaya Prakash and his team are expected to be the spearheads of these forces. In the storm centres where they worked they showed themselves not unworthy men. Fearlessness and the abandon born of it are great

qualities rare in a slave people, much more so in its middle classes. Statesman leaders of India have brought her to a point when their work is almost done. Fightermen now must come forward and fulfil the new challenge.

#### THINKING TIME?

I have not talked of work because 'work' has been suspended these ten days. Somehow life never means relaxation because even these workless days kept one breathlessly busy. If only the 'negotiations' were carried on in an hermetically sealed chamber and the world informed that its decisions would be announced on a fixed date, whatever the result, much waste of national energy could have been avoided. As it is, New Delhi is exercising a paralysing influence. All talk of immediate work lacks reality. Perhaps this is the time then to say with the sage walrus, "the time has come to think of many things"—Has it come?



purpose.

There comes a time in life when desire turns away from material to non-material objects. At such a moment in an individual's history the dust and din of a householder's existence turn it into a desert. Oasis seeking becomes a passion, Gandhiji long long ago turned his face away from the ordinary occupations and standards of his social status. His experiment has been outstandingly successful—his amazing output of work bears sufficient testimony.

While waiting for co-workers to assemble here, I thought I would observe life in Bhangiwadi, study its spirit and see if this pattern could be synthesised to meet demands of a different nature and for a different generation.

The Birla Houses in India have acquired undeserved notoriety. Millionaire hosts cannot become supporters of a cause that has in it the germ of a social revolution that will sooner or later eliminate them. And yet, in India's anti-Imperialist queue, stray millionaires form its tail-end. Unnecessary publicity, however, is given to them. Gandhiji has a use for every man in this queue but sometimes the shrewd make use of the prestige his association brings. And much misunderstanding exists about the role of capital owners in the national struggle. Their pittance for assisting it is magnified disproportionately to their advantage, but to Gandhiji's and Congress' disadvantage. The simple Indian is a snob somewhere. Gandhiji's Birla House stay was not repugnant to him as such. It was only after '42 that he saw the wall between Gandhiji and his hosts, and was aghast to find the latter so callous and indifferent to him when he and crisis faced each other. Therefore Gandhiji's decision to give up living with his rich admirers, made anti-capitalist, anti-careerist embittered men and women, happy.

Bhangiwadi has all the facilities of a General's camp. Two telephones, reception rooms, a secretariat, a suite for guests, a field kitchen and eating shed, thatched roofs and tents instead of brick and mortar structures. How devastatingly representative of our mud hut civilization and categorically different from the massive stone-built Imperial Secretariat and Viceregal Palace of Imperial rulers. But to a foreigner this camp is just a phoney H.Q. of a revolutionary organization about to take up responsibility for the state...

### 3. Mould for Action

ENVIRONMENT and Ecology shape minds, they invest one with material for fighting life's battles, or for accepting life as it comes. A sharp will is required to build a framework that enhances one's powers of self expression. With changing times and altering urges it must triumph over the pull of tradition. On taking rigid measures to control the time-space, man-society parallelogram we live in, depends on our ability to extract from every hour the hard grain of achievement. Regimentation when it helps to organise thought and generate action is a good thing. Over-simplified denunciations of controls overlook the fact that volatility and distractibility must be checked to preserve life energy at its maximum potency.

There was a time when with other Anglophiles of my class I used to scoff at Gandhiji's Ashram life. It was for some (it still is) the fashion to be irreverent and therefore modern about such institutions. Inmates of Sabarmati and Wardha were subjected to well-meaning ridicule. In our shortsightedness some of us could not distinguish between a cult-colony and work colony. Men and women devoted to a "master's" well-being may at times develop a mental squint. "Bhangiwadi" may look very different from the actual living space peopled by the scavengers themselves. The village Congress session may result in a town atmosphere invading rural areas rather than the latter influencing Congress-nagar. But the effort they represent, this moving closer to the poorer in body and mind and material belonging rather than running away from them is a healthy and useful departure. Gandhiji the pioneer has broken fresh ground here as in almost every walk of life and made us tiresomely nostalgic for oasis living. I say oasis living



Early in the morning at 4 a.m. under a sky still brooding in the dark the camp dwellers pray, and later a batch of young men come along and drill themselves and later on women (and men) sit spinning yarn. No soap-box harangues, no sober political study circles either. No militant figures all abustle, nor sentries changing guard but boy scouts keep watch and order; and yet the foreigners are told that this is the main centre for radiating radical political and social work. Some foreigners, pressmen mostly, try to be sympathetic while others can barely cover their antipathy. Those who always have an eye on the foreign angle are apologetic or sheepish when an American or English critic talks of the anti-diluvian conditions in 'GAANDI'S' camps. Some of us have grown unslavish enough to be indifferent to their views.

Gandhiji's days are packed with work, and but for the routine he has evolved he could not have borne the physical strain. Beginning and ending his day with prayer brings him strength. Interpersing his work hours with brief spells of rest and regular meal times he covers enough work in his 24 hours that a normal man would take three times that time. It is amazing how he has to look into the smallest detail; ailing patients, frustrated men and women, the distressed in mind—all have a claim on his work day as much as his political colleagues or British Cabinet men. Gandhiji's colony is a training centre without a syllabus in black and white. And yet Gandhiji alone has raised a corps of trained cadres. Organising autonomous institutions to work out his constructive programme these men lead lives devoted to its fulfilment. But they now need revitalization. A change in their courses of instruction, more innovations in their equipment, a little more imagination in their human approach and this body of men could scarcely be equalled. Even in '42 they rose to meet the onrush of repression fearlessly and undogmatically. What if they realized later that in doing so they had transgressed the laws of *Satyagraha*? The time for action did not find them wanting. They were perhaps afraid of his rebukes. They need not have been. Gandhiji values independence of thought and action if they spring from genuine conviction. In the *Harijan* of 21st inst. writing about J.P. and R.M.L. he says:—

'You know Shri Jaya Prakash Narayan and Dr. Lohia. Both of them are daring men of action and scholars. They could easily have become rich. But they chose the way of renunciation and

service. To break the chains of their country's slavery was their one passion. Naturally the alien Government regarded them as dangerous to its existence and put them in prison. We, however, have different scales to weigh merit and we regard them as patriots who have sacrificed their all for the love of the country which has given them birth. That they would be found wanting in the scales of non-violence is irrelevant today. What is relevant is that independence of India is today common ground between the British and ourselves...'

A critical understanding of Gandhiji brings one nearer to the spirit of his message. If a new synthesis is not worked out the blind alley we have reached will eventually become a bottleneck. Progress in terms of masses of humanity will be no easy target. Fixity, ruthless self-control, a big grip on the shifting strands of our political ideals, are demands that we must make on ourselves. It is audacious to think of remoulding man's life, it is equally preposterous to attempt it without making a mould for oneself.



spoke and I replied that must remain undivulged. The glare of publicity serves no purpose, when that which is publicised is meant for private consumption only. An understanding is hard to establish, but somehow he, in spite of our expressed differences, drew me into his inner-but-one circle—of sons and daughters. In fragmentary talks conducted in the course of early morning and late evening walks, it is not possible to import that continuity and fluidity essential for decisive purposes. Since time did not permit this—an assignment in Poona summoning me—I concluded my visit to Sevagram.

In between my appointments at Sevagram and public meetings (which I need not describe, as they are getting more than their share of recognition in the Press) the meetings of Congress workers were a stimulating exercise in thinking *extempore* and aloud. Questions needing answers apparently, have not for long been addressed by the "ordinary" workers to any of the oracle leaders. Talking to them, the need for dispelling confusion and telling Congressmen definitely what were priority tasks began to appear to me as urgent. They had grasped essentials incompletely, and felt inadequate organizationally. Three years and more of illegal existence had disintegrated the machinery. A strong personality to guide, a clear programme of preparation and rebuilding were urgently required. More material for reporting to those who matter, I said to myself as I left them.

On the railway platform, *en route* to Bombay, a significant feature was the presence of Rashtra Seva Dal volunteers, and large numbers of women. Unmindful of the cold late hours, they sat.

A pathetic faith in myths brings these countless unknowns together. Giving them mere slogan-formulae for vigilance-preparation and courage-building seemed ironic. All these qualities lay incipient in their eyes, voices and limbs, lean and athletic.

#### BOMBAY

Bombay and my work there, gave me a new routine. In the Kanagar Maidan meetings, the suburban dwellers' meetings, and the more publicised Chowpatty and Shivaji Park meetings, I met men and women who were no strangers to me. In this city the White man's bureaucracy does not inflict its presence on you. At

## 4. Seven Weeks Seven Cities

ON the way to Wardha, I was conscious of nervousness. Gandhiji's chosen city would perhaps look askance at one whose protestant temperament refused submission on grounds of a faith only. Congressmen and the people of Wardha, however, proved that protestantism is no sin. They accepted it as a token of health. The drive to Sevagram again made me thoughtful. I had read of the charm of the rural scene amidst which Gandhiji dwelt. The charm lay, I found, in the knowledge that a great man stayed there.

#### GANDHIJI

Evening prayers had begun, hymnal chants, the still erect figure of Gandhiji, a small group of men and women attentive, silent..., stars lit the sky overhead, spring breezes stirred the trees here and there. The yellow light of kerosene lamps lit him. He sat in meditation, the man who had moved two generations of Indian men and women, taught them to think as free individuals and not act as slaves.

Gandhiji's first words to me and my replies have, I am told, been reported by the maudlin, in as sentimental a manner as could be thought of.

My reporting to him was no new matter. He has himself been gracious enough to acknowledge that I had taken every possible opportunity of acquainting him with what I felt he should know since his release. That which I had to say I said, again not to justify myself but to inform, to seek through him, to communicate with those for whom he is the best bridge. There is much of what he



every turn here amongst men of all classes and ranks, you find some who have lost fear and acquired courage. Bombay is vividly associated in my mind with 1942 and many peril-filled days. Its labour population though swayed by Communist propaganda had shown signs of regaining its lost national sense. The average Congressman and student there, is keenly alive to his social and political responsibilities. The citizen has so grown accustomed to police terror there, that he has lost all fear of authority.

As my scheduled stay drew to its end, the Ratings of the Navy episode shook the city for three days as nothing had done for years. It was a spontaneous flare-up. Imperial arrogance acted like tinder and vague resentment blazed into a flame of instantaneous revolt. On all that happened there, I will not dwell, for I must hasten to catch the mail.

### POONA

In Poona, the city of the great figures in Maharashtra history, I saw many familiar young faces—ex-secretaries and messenger servicemen of the growing organisation of Indian Nationhood. They were the men who had made communication possible when all communication was denied to us.

Gandhiji and I talked briefly in Poona. He and I are still engaged in exploration that may lead to mutual discoveries. That I have acquired the privilege to gain his ear and report on behalf of those whom I represent is an advantage. I may not have been able to conform, but I have been frank and have tried sincerely to understand. Conformity and identity based on mis-reading are not conducive to development.

"We understand you more than any other set of Congressmen", I claimed. We were talking about Arthur Koestler's estimate of him and our hostile reaction to it. When people express surprise that Gandhiji should not agree with my politics, I am surprised. We claim to interpret the theory of action on its merits. He will subject them to ethical evaluations that are his sole standards. How is identity possible? Why be surprised when it is not possible? If his frank criticism of our views takes away from us support, we must try to do without such support. Sanctions gained on false assumptions never add strength to those who lean on them. If we can prove our worth as soldiers in the service of freedom, he

will not disown us. Mere verbiage, sophistry, and shirking work will discredit us in his and our peoples' estimation.

The well-tries, soundly organised R.S.D. workers, men and women of its H.Q. impressively uniformed were smartly drawn up at a rally. Looking at them, I was convinced finally of the need for initiating a youth movement in every village, in every Province.

The Congressmen I met in Poona, were somewhat confused by my trend of reasoning. My crude clarifications seemed to satisfy the rank and file. Not the select.

### CALCUTTA

In a brief 48 hours' stay in Calcutta after a month's absence, I found the Railway workers keyed up in anticipation of a strike. Their disillusionment on post-war retrenchment and gloomy forecasts of wage-cut have made them bitter against yesterday's advocates of a People's War. They openly confess that had they known better, 1942 would not have found them apathetic.

### ASSAM AND BACK

Assam is within twenty-four hours reach of Calcutta and culturally also quite near. But to many in India, it is remoter than the North-West and less known than Cape Comorin. I wonder why. My own affinities with it are remarkably strong. Its people have a rugged quality of soul. Its men and women have hearts without smallness, unsophisticated, courageous and ill-suited to intrigue.

August 1942 found them in the forefront of the great struggle. On the way to Assam, the small towns are seething with Bengalees, impatient of *status quo*.

The famine of Bengal killed millions. Those deaths still haunt them. They know the reality of Imperial rule. They seek a formula for freedom. "If you can give us one 'Leader' who will choose to work in rural Bengal and not treat Calcutta as Bengal, we shall show you how strong we can be. Nehru is All-India, Sarat Babu is All India", they complain.

The workers in the A. & B. Railway are well-prepared. Their



Association has taken every necessary step for the strike balls and the strike.

In Assam again, known faces so welcome when spotted in a motley assembly closed around one. From Gauhati to Nowgong one sped past fields and distant hills. Men and women, peasants and tea-garden labourers, they all knew that the Congress *raj* had begun. But the knowledge had not enthused them much. "Jail delivery was not all we thought we fought for". Patiently they await the unfolding of Congress's Quit India Plan.

In the meetings in Jorhat and Gauhati, I related my encounters with Muslim Leaguers who came to stone and belabour me while I was on my way to Assam. I told them of my experiment with *Ahimsa* in facing them and inviting their blows and their refusal to stone or strike me. They shouted "Pakistan" and demanded that I join their League. "The British can give you Pakistan. If you can fight them, go ahead," I said. "While I am fighting for Hindustan, if you join me and fight Britain for your Pakistan, may be, you will realise that your enemy is not the Hindu from whom you wish to separate. Nazimuddin's League Ministry could not save Muslim Bengalees from dying of starvation—it was a Ministry doing what the British wanted it to".

They were silenced. Simple impassioned Indians, Muslims and Hindus, follow frank talk and respect fearlessness. I narrated the story because I did not want them to be afraid of the Muslim League's opposition. The Congress Premier and Ministers must be told by the Assam Congressmen that not appeasement of the League, but a mass amelioration drive is called for.

Back in Calcutta after a day of platform meetings, I should have felt fatigued. But the sight of thousands acts as a tonic. Up at the Howrah Maidan massed with labour men, I found sympathetic and sensitive listeners.

The fight for more cloth and better housing and shorter working hours means to them the real fight for freedom. They seek only aid. Congressmen must not fail them.

Back again in Delhi. Curfew. The scene here is all of a pattern. Section 144 rule, i.e. no meetings. Workers and citizens in prison or injured in hospitals.

Imperial Delhi bosses wanted the poor citizen to "celebrate

victory. The Imperialists have as yet not grasped the fact that they can force Indians into prisons, but they cannot order them to make merry. The will not to tolerate foreign authority is hardening—that is a lesson that the English rulers are reluctant to learn.

And that is the end of my story covering seven weeks and seven cities.



soul. The idealist urge, the desire to dream and to work so that the vision becomes reality, permeates a corner of its edge. Into this corner men and women born with that urge flock.

This fraternity of idealists in every age and every land fights its battles for the weak—losing battles, but worthwhile ones. Their quest is simple. To bring into being a community where hunger and fear are banished, where happiness and grief can be exalted; unprovoked by either the menace of need or the fear of fear.

How does one achieve this purpose? This is a question all of us who live for a purpose ask one another. The answer comes, ORGANISE. What and whom do we organise? "In the works of the revolutionaries the struggle is glorified and the man who struggles. Do we like the struggle for its own sake? No, the struggle is a political means, as politics is a means, too. Without the struggle, without politics we are the iron on which the hammer is beating. But we must become the hammer that shapes the iron". An apt quotation from a European revolutionary book.

That sums up our case rather well. If we want to become the hammer that shapes the iron we must work out the processes involved in converting iron into hammers. For this we need a voluntary association of men and women employed in the 'hammer factory'. Human beings who will emerge from it spiritually, mentally and physically fit to deal death blows to an unjust order. That I dare say is what we mean when through flaming proclamations or quiet discussion we point out the relevance of organisation to our prescribed ends.

At Neral, a village on the road to Poona, the Bombay Rashtra Kava Dal instructors have been leading a camp life for three weeks now. Thirty-five young men training for a life of struggle, simplicity and social revolution. Everyone of them was eagerness personified. Bronzed skins, wiry physiques, these youth of Maharashtra were preparing through action. Our elaborate manifestation urging workers to organize, to work, was being put into real action. Their routine was no different to that of Boy Scouts Camps. But the meaning behind their syllabus was rich with feeling and ennobled by high thought. Through games, physical training and study classes they were welding hardness into their youthful lives. The hard knob of the hammer. As they saluted the National Flag, or marched in formation, or practised the art of the

## 5. Fraternities: Social Groupings

ACTION born of purely spontaneous impulse is rare. Individuals no less than masses of people seek to subordinate action to thought. They make them definite and purposeful and measure the results according to a set standard. Impulsive action is usually decried because it leads to ineffectiveness. Yet in the larger movements governing history, spontaneity has lit fires consuming and devastating. It is nevertheless true that man owes his peculiar status on earth today to acquiring the art of organisation. The family, the clan, the tribe were forerunners of organised institutions like governments and of class and such like groupings.

Social organisation as a process by which individuals are associated in a group has become intensely significant today. As it becomes progressively more acute, the place of individuals as social forces decreases, and this is no unhealthy development. The collective will of a group rather than the arbitrary rule of individuals should control community life. It minimises the element of error due to narrow individual predilections in social and historic development. Also, the larger body need not depend on its more assertive units. Real freedom of thought and action is insured, power is collectivised and its misuse lessened.

But hitherto, organisation has been the monopoly of the crafty and the greedy. Nature's inequalities have reflected themselves in our human organisation. The strong have overpowered the weak, and in the struggle of *masses vs. men, men have won*. History is full of the infinite trials of the oppressed and history is not a matter of thousands of centuries. Here and now the mills of tyranny are busy grinding away, mutilating the rights of man.

The saving grace lies somewhere near the edge of the social



lathi and the art of handling dummy rifles, I noticed a glow on their faces. It was the glow of self-confidence. The sharp drill 'orders' were incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Brevity must be the soul of efficiency—I thought. In the short time I spent in the camp I realised the value of organised life. Watching a military parade of troops on the march one becomes resentful. The state organises its men into armies for purposes of either retaining power or resisting the equally matched. These boys were organising their talents voluntarily to become the unaided man's army, to oppose an oppressor State, to destroy money-power. They gained their lessons from the spinning wheel and the dummy rifle, from the Gita as much as from Socialist literature. Paradoxical but comprehensive.

The Seva Dal songs echoed through the valley; a challenge from the unconquered faith of youth in moving mountains, to grow free and strong, to destroy and build. In this camp I witnessed the evolution of the new Indian and before my day is done, I would like to see this process established in every corner of the country. A new type for a new order. Or else the latter may not last long, even if achieved early.

The tales of '42 came to one as from geographical units, when secret working was essential. I had read in our underground bulletins of Vir Kotwal's acts of bravery. I had heard of his death on the 2nd of January 1943 in Sidhagad, shot through the head and chest. I have not known, however, that with him had died a loyal young lieutenant, Hira Patil. At Neral, Goma Patil (the father) and his wife came all the way from their village, five miles away. Hira was their only son, 25 years of age. Goma Patil was with Kotwal when he was surrounded by the police. In the exchange of gunfire old Goma escaped, young Hira was fatally wounded! In Goma Patil's face there is no sorrow or bitterness. He is just bland, apparently calm. But I could not take my eyes off the emaciated face of Hira's mother. Petrified tears, lightless unseeing eyes, grim and silent, grief past the stage when its wounds hurt—a relic of a bygone rebellion. Such derelicts are common and the inevitable residue of a mass struggle. That is the complacent politician's view. Ours is different. These sufferers' faces shall stare us in the night, reminding us that the price they paid is a debt—a national obligation—they expect reparations, in terms other than cash.

In the village of Neral common women had gathered in large numbers. The women of Maharashtra are collectively the most unconstrained. Hard working women are an asset to any community but not if they become drudges. Women have in them rich possibilities. Unutilised they lock up specialised talent. An organisation to be complete must have in its composition women in active service.

In the railway carriage a woman of the working classes travelling with me became communicative. Her knowledge of newspaper personalities was remarkable. She asked me why 'we' fight for them'. A difficult question, particularly when posed by such as she was. I wondered why, although my reply satisfied her query, she talked of the 'Mahars' in her colony in Worli and sneered at their criminal acts. They tried to kill Mahatma Gandhi. How utterly foolish of them! The Gods protect their own, they send them to earth to do good. We have driven out these Mahars—by boycotting them socially! "Will the Girni Union succeed in raising our wages? Can't the Congress Unions take up our cases?" She was intelligent and self-possessed. From her talk with her other friends I got a glimpse into the human problems behind abstract ones.

I cannot yet reconcile myself to the post-revolution state of our minds. Why do workers insist on mass gatherings? Nana Patil and his band of workers are household gods (not names) in the working class population of Bombay. Why was it necessary to insist that they make a political debut after their splendid guerilla resistance of three years and more? "Awakening the workers' patriotic emotions." "Presenting to his gaze human idols", can't we change the technique? However, two lakhs with Gandhi caps on, are an impressive sight. A uniformed mass, it was actually a rally of Bombay workers, the biggest ever held for a hitherto unknown band of national workers. When their day arrives even they will perhaps not be able to do away with these demonstrations. Display of strength after all may develop strength. It remains wasted when the show becomes an end in itself. We must guard against such emptiness.

And back again we come to our big need—organisation. If every landlord and every kisan is to fight for his freedom, he needs to be taught how to fight. For imparting that teaching you need teachers. The teachers must know what to teach and their medium



must not be just books. Who will provide these minimum requirements for training workers? Either an individual or an organisation. The former cannot import into his or her effort that efficiency which a group can. Hence the need for an organisation. Collective striving brings to an organisation group strength. But the group should not become a coterie, it must be elastic, not dogmatic in its politics, free from prejudices, unorthodox. But in its work it must have all the pointedness of a closed compact team! Paradox again—efficient turnover should be our main priority. We are out to oppose a mechanised organisation. A social order based on an army of occupation and an army of bureaucrats will require a planned assault, and for planning as for execution we need to ORGANISE.

The Seva Dal youths carried on their work in total unconcern over the fate of the British-Congress negotiations. Everywhere except in the fields and factories the question of questions is, "Has the ship of freedom got torpedoed in the high seas?"

## 6. Approach to Personalities

PERSONALITIES whose activities lend colour and direction to an age are rare. But this shortage in numbers is made good by the influence they radiate. Even in times remote humanity kept count of men renowned for their prowess, learning or godliness. They were sources of inspiration to little men in strange, far apart, lands. News of kings, priests and saints travelled far and wide. Those however who enjoyed world influence were never many.

Every country and every age has brought into relief men around whom have grown schools of thought and action. And a complex of causes operates to produce these personalities. The wind and tide of circumstance become for them a crucible. Biological and environmental factors become the fuel beneath it, while the spiritual instincts of past generations light the fire. Struggling against inherited tendencies, overcoming social handicaps, men who become personalities now come to the selection of values. And this selection grows into a personal philosophy. To the extent to which they succeed in refusing to remain prisoners of their past, they attract the attention of those who fail. The spiritual content however, of the values that stamp their personal philosophies must appeal to the masses' instinctive need for spiritual leadership; otherwise they fail to react. On the spontaneous reaction of the masses to a body of ideas depends the latter's dynamic powers.

Little men build up great men because they feel weak and the great are great because they are either wise, or strong, or clever. When the great are all three together they transcend to Godhood.

Therefore, those who control the organisation-life and thought-life of a people are men of intelligence, firmness of purpose and insight. Further, imagination and integrity usually ce-



ment their characteristics. To guide a large following of men and women so that the trust reposed by them may not be betrayed, the leaders of men have to be eternally on the watch. *The purpose once fixed, the methods employed to achieve it must subserve the end.* If perfection of means becomes an end, let this be the goal. But if the goal is total freedom from social, political and economic ills, then in the way of its attainment no other interventions should be tolerated.

Watching Gandhiji at the congregational prayers is a valuable experience. Is his struggle twin-fronted? The perfection of the individual receives so much attention that all available energy and material is absorbed in the attempt. Change from within or conditioning through external stimuli is another unresolved poser. At his prayers an attempt is made to combine both the methods. Gandhiji's insistence on the gathering's hymn-clapping in unison is not appreciated by cynics. Some see in it a futile adaptation of a Western method, others a deliberate attempt at side-tracking spiritual soporifics. Either of these interpretations may be over simplifications.

As one who knows he is law unto our medieval masses, he may not ignore their psychological urges. And yet, as one who has essentially set his heart and soul on changing both Indian manhood and its slave environment, he feels the compulsion for a compromise. Tested pragmatically, his method has been amazingly successful, so far. But certain signs do indicate that the method has outlived its utility. Squeezed of its efficacy, it is about to fall into decay. Philosopher-kings and priest-kings have had their day. It is only in our country that Gandhiji had revived the concept in the 20th century. True, in the modern ideal polity, the concept is reappearing in new form. That is largely because the Western man has overreached himself in his quest for material satisfaction. To check this pedestrian philosophy of life the West is turning to the Easterners' search for soul perfection as an antidote. While this should be a warning to such of us as seek to imitate the Anglo-Saxons slavishly, we cannot afford to be blind to the limitations of the theory and practice of Gandhiji's philosophy.

Daily at his feet through prayers and hymns slave hearts pour out exuberantly their devotion. In advising that they should dedicate all action to God he appears to me to be preaching to the con-

verted. We Indian slaves are so completely absorbed in seeking spiritual solace out of our physical miseries, that Gandhiji's streamlining its significance only adds to our ingrained fatalism—so fatal to our growth into freemen. There is of course always a political-social note in his daily discourses after the prayers. These talks again end up, of late, on a note of defeat, that is of submission to our inherent weaknesses and lack of faith in God. His suggestion that only a mastery over the lower self, as purer faith in a deity and greater strength of spirit will break the red ring of ill will and treachery thrown around us by a powerful foreign power acts as a depressant. Even if this be partly true, is it not very much more necessary that some external pressure through organised action be applied to the slack-willed, underfed, undeveloped body-mind of our millions stirring them into action for self growth rather than lulling them into an introvert's despair mood? Is that not what our masses need? In the prayer gatherings men and women come to worship the master rather than follow the leader. Let us have worship in our hearts; but let us demand that we march to our goal and not pray our way to it.

At long last the British have betrayed the trust Gandhiji had in their good intentions. The saint in him is too strong not to admit an error of judgment. He has confessed that his faith has been replaced by 'misgivings' and 'fear'. He is surrounded by darkness and therefore unable to lead and he ascribes his own misgivings to his lack of faith in God! This is the man-of-religion's escape. Smaller individuals see in his confession nothing but naive goodness exploited by an astute opponent. We who cannot forget the inhumanities perpetrated by the British never had any doubts as to their intentions. Manoeuvring for a change of position is no change of heart. Our leaders have been double-crossed. Reactionary allies have helped the British Labour Party to get away with plausible excuses again. They will plead that internecine quarrel stopped them from fulfilling their noble mission. Lao-Tsean humour will help them to prove their case. In his words the British will proclaim:

*The good ones I declare good  
The bad ones I also declare good  
That is the goodness of Virtue*



*The honest ones I believe  
The liars I also believe  
That is the faith of Virtue.*

Finally, after one whole year's effort at freedom struggle we are where we were! One farce has ended. And now a one act play begins. The audience—a larger one this time—will now witness the Indians' incapacity to think concretely and to act unitedly. In theory we are told the British have quitted. In practice they remain just so long as we can't decide amongst ourselves the manner in which we shall loot the treasure house that is India!

In the meantime, hungry men and women have started dying. Ill-paid workers have taken to inconvenient ways of getting better wages. Petty tyrants and puppet rulers have dared to check the freedom movements of Congress leaders and Congress revolutionaries. The passion for freedom seeks an outlet everywhere. In Madras men died because Jawaharlal was insulted in Kashmir, a Congress Minister's regime not withstanding! But unless we have the courage to organise their emotional and physical qualities, men will go on dying pointlessly. They will be the subject of pity, not praise. Congressmen everywhere will have to think hard whether they will continue to fight for freedom or discuss what structural shape it *should have when it descends on us.*

## 7. Hundred Men meet Future Horizon

Why do we usually meet in a group or a mass? To convey an idea to discuss and plan action. Be it religious or political, ceremonial or social, there is always a purpose. And the purpose is evaluated. Is it good or is it bad? It all depends on one's scale of values. Over-simplified preferences are easier to follow. Likes and dislikes are born far back in one's ancestral heritage. They grow out of the tyranny of instincts into a rational framework. With the growth of personality they reach new levels. When the mind's soil has attained saturation point after it has sucked in every drop of nourishment, values tend to get crystallised, finality is attained. Maturity and wisdom are installed where all was raw and wayward; a balanced being is born. Life acquires an integrated meaning. The purpose grows clearer and living not a matter of marking time but a positive growth.

Political thought and action even in their present day connotation do not usually attract the bulk of a people. Very largely, people do not permit intelligent and coherent thinking in their mental sweep. The human bulk is influenced into reactions, both positive and negative. Its own initiative awaits a pressure. It is always the few who act as levers. It is the many who act in response. In the human order everywhere there have been periods of intense mass action followed by long stretches of apparent inactivity. Every age has registered its own particular social and political urges. In every age individuals have singly or in groups shaped the direction of these urges. The role of an individual or a large number of individuals depends on what values they stress; their decisions can be regarding self or others. If the latter, such men become motivating factors, kinetic agents. Their consciousness of



ends for the larger group drives them into a fold. They seek out individuals who share their thought and hold similar objectives. This is what leads to the birth of religious, political and social movements. And out of them are born men who direct the flow of group thought and action. They are either leaders, or workers, men out to merge themselves in a process.

When the urge to remove oppressions from the social order becomes volcanic in intensity, it is said to be a revolutionary period. Social discontent is not easily observable. Men and women strive in silence, die unattended, grow callous with pain, without knowing or even caring to know why they suffer. It is not possible for them to realise what or who oppresses them. That the money power of the privileged is at the root of all their misery, they cannot see until the Social Revolutionary's pointing finger spots the evil.

The task of those who impose on themselves the duty of re-ordering society is usually an uphill effort. Man resists change even if it is from hell to a promised heaven. Natural inertia is his enemy No. 1. The fear of the unknown comes next. Abandon and daring are rarely integrated with a socially useful end. More often than not they develop anti-social tendencies in the victims of our lopsided civilisation. So that such as would work for a new heaven and a new earth must not only be prepared to oppose entrenched evil but root out the down and out's incapacity to resist the powerful. The social revolutionary must be well equipped himself if he is to fight battles for the weak against the strong.

He cannot be weak and unprepared. *Mental and physical training for a warrior life are absolutely essential.* A clear vision of the goal is indispensable and the means of waging war available at every step...

All the hundred men or nearly so who met in Bombay last week were men of action. A great upheaval had found them thrown on the same heap of circumstance. The storm had abated, their struggles had become a matter of history; its results not calculable at all. But the evil they had set out to destroy remained palpable, visible, almost irremovable.

These men from all over were again in the cleft of the interregnum. They knew that their job was not over. Would this be that inevitable lull after the storm? If so, where should they begin?

Or was this the end? No, they would go on in their search as far as their span of life permitted. The search would be for the next opportunity and new strength. Through group action (or Party) they knew they could complete their incomplete work. And they assembled to ask each other and their leaders where and how to begin afresh.

This band of nationalist patriots was of keenly conscious men. They were experienced in the art of political struggles of the Congress conception. Some knew the methods evolved by the people themselves. They were that group in the Congress who thought deeply attached to its militant nationalism found its official programmes inadequate, its organisation insufficiently elastic, its present offices closed to them. This was a team with incentives of a different intensity and velocity. It could not work with fellow Congressmen who accepted the elder leaders' policies unquestioningly. They found the Congress lead healthy but its leaders less so. They sought a new direction, fresh clarification and more than anything an organisation and a plan.

The fact that the Congress was nearly on the point of accepting Britain's *bona fides* regarding quitting upset their calculations considerably. The machinery which Britain wanted to set in motion to drive itself out of its Indian Empire made good faith difficult. Its concessions to communal demands had virtually ended the hopes of those who wished to strike at the root of our internal discords. Communal frontiers would lock them into communal territories. From joint electorates to a Hindu-Muslim-Sikh India was a big drop. A dictated plan that must either be worked or thrown out by a majority of those whose interest it suited was a strange version of a freedom plan. A Constituent body not representative of more than one man in a million was to work out Free India constitution. And the Britisher who prized Democracy so dearly that he fought two big wars for its sake did not feel outraged at such an infringement of the people's rights. The Socialist Britisher is the half brother of Churchill on Indian issues. Even more incongruous was the fact that the British would supervise these freedom formulating arrangements. An interim Government would rule in the meantime, with England's Viceroy and her army and her bureaucrats ever watchful, and ready to sidetrack events in the name of minority justice if not law and order. The



Constituent Assembly had no constituent authority and yet the elder leaders had agreed to accept it as a correct machinery for effecting transfer of power. However, since the only alternative lay in agreeing with the leaders or opposing them, the worker-fighters decided to await the Congress Working Committee's final decision. The Congress would not be consulted at all!

While asking for an organisation and plan for work the workers disclosed many interesting problems. Should the old group in the Congress retain their former organic structure? Or should the post-'42 arrangement stand? A co-ordination was suggested and accepted.

About the work and its character all appeared agreed on the need for intensified effort among the people. The villager and the worker in organised industry were still far from alert for action *en masse*. Whatever their potentialities they were not initiated. Training in democratic forms along co-operative lines alone could enable the men of our soil to be their own saviours. However well meaning and ideally identified with them one might become their sorrows were theirs. The town-leader educated and reared in an atmosphere far removed from their own could only be their specialist-physician. His intensity may never burn fiercely. His keenness may be blunted. Nevertheless for awakening the dormant soul of the man to whom freedom will mean the end of poverty and the beginning of new opportunities, the town-bred leader is doing good work. Whether for working towards a Social revolution he will be equally zealous is a matter of grave doubt. However, the hundred men who gathered in Bombay, went away reassured. Acquiring an assurance that their wilderness existence was over and that the foundations for organised work had been laid, heartened them.

The picture of the next struggle was blurred. Is the nationalist fight against Imperialism over? Will the next assault be a class assault? Will the Congress become a Government Party? Breaking up a meeting with unsolved questions haunting one, is not good. But it is high realism today, when uncertainty is the only certainty.

## 8. The Casual Chain

THE Chain of Casualty is winding and long. It binds together a heterogeneous mass of men and events. It makes galley slaves of free men, transforms weakness into strength, brings prosperity to the few and disaster to many. Never does this process strike one so insistently as during a war. Watching the interactions of casual factors and their resultants is a fascinating mental exercise. It is also interesting. Who has not known the elusive satisfaction when the original idea of a whole chain of unconnected ideas is reached at last? The arbitrary tyranny of association-formations in the mind is as ruthless in its social workings. Man seems so completely at the mercy of a determinist ordering. History then is no more than a plaything of this inexorable mechanism. Why be a little cog in its intricate soulless game? This is cynicism, the wise will proclaim. And cynicism kills the incentive for action and actionists would die if they found action meaningless. Either this world in all its full-bloodedness or oblivion-dreaming, with all its call to the aloof in one—if only some compromise were possible, self-poised and self-direction would be better achieved....

### THE AZAD HIND FAUJ

Refutations like this will have to be explained. It might startle some if I confess that they were caused by a close-up view of officers of the Azad Hind Fauj. These are men from every corner of our land, men of good physique and genial temperament who but for an accident of history would have returned as India's liberators. Equally easily, they could have been officers of the Army of occupation, untouched by the last crisis in human affairs, awaiting fresh instructions from their Imperial lords, carrying them out



for the sake of a living.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGE

As it happens they were fortunate. Given a chance to prove that Indians, slaves though they are, can overcome fear and temptations offered by a wily friend, they broke away from the British yoke and did not bend before the Japanese. They stood up for their nation and under its biggest man of daring, Subhas Chandra Bose, planned and fought its freedom. In terms of actual achievement their record could not be one of success. Fate or that awesome casual chain had willed the other way.

The psychological change however that came over the mind of India since the formation of the *Azad Hind Hukumat* can be counted as a positive gain. Its radio broadcasts dispelled gloom, its rumoured preparations brought hope. Not all the king's horses could convince Indians that Subhas Bose was Tojo's stooge; not all the lofty arguments make them believe that he had committed an ideological sin in declaring war on the Anglo-Saxon Democracies. Freedom-desiring India felt that a sporting chance of success had come. Subhas Bose fighting beyond India's borders and the Congress-inspired resistance forces active within the country, they thought perhaps the end of slavery was near. Our self-respect as an Asiatic nation gained in stature at the thought that an Asiatic power was being utilised for assisting our fight for freedom. Indians generally were not obsessed with a liberalism that meant anti-Whiteism.

### THE SMALL MAN'S WILL

We who faced a set of difficult problems in our internal struggle against imperialism in the years '42, '43 and '44 looked at this magnificent effort less emotionally. De Gaulle's and the Polish Government's examples in Europe were before us. We expected the Azad Hind Government to come to our rescue. We felt that the movement in the country deserved more attention from those who sought to co-ordinate military invasion with a mass uprising. Perhaps it would be impolitic to dilate on this aspect today. But if liberation movements beyond India's frontiers are meant to be real and alive and not romantic gestures, they should not be isolated from corresponding movements in the country. In the scales of

history the Azad Hind Fauj and Subhas Babu might have been found wanting. What was it that changed overnight, as it were, this threatened verdict and turned a brave but defeated hero and his army into conquering gods? The will of 40 crores, the martyrdom of the 50 thousand during the August rebellion, the small undiluted Do or Die man's unbending will! The Indian National Congress, that reservoir of militant India notwithstanding its own record of non-violence, could not ignore, the Azad Hind Fauj officers and men. Its concern for the Fauj reflected the nation's concern. And the Nation received back this army exultantly. In its exuberance it forgot itself and demonstrated against their imprisonment and punishment at British hands. In welcoming it and agitating on behalf of it, more died, more were imprisoned and assaulted. What of it? Netaji's name and Netaji's men were worth dying for—in vicarious fulfilment they found the consolation and station denied them in their own efforts.

### TOTAL FREEDOM FIGHT

In every village I have passed through, every town I have visited the Azad Hind Fauj leaders are known and volunteering under its name attracts larger numbers than under the usual Seva Dal name. A free Indian State in embryo exists everywhere. It needs to be nourished and developed. The man or men who created the Azad Hind Fauj in Burma are back amidst us. Psychologically revolutionised, technically equipped, experienced in the art of fighting and governing, they lived for many months as free Indians. That in itself is an advantage over the tallest Indian in unfree India. The Generals and Commanders of the Azad Hind Fauj should on their own initiative refashion the strategy and technique of the fight against India's foreign rulers and their collaborators. The Indian National Congress is pledged to fight for total freedom. Its struggles hitherto have succeeded insofar as agitational action can succeed. In a recapitulation of methods used so far many of them will have to be discarded as they are spent and emptied of all effectiveness. The forms evolved in '42 were crude and therefore limited. But essentially the striking power of the weapons of '42 is unimpaired. *A vitalising symbol so far, the officers and men of the Azad Hind Fauj can become a vital force*



## SUBHAS TO GANDHIJI

The raw material of human nature in our country is neither flabby nor devoid of intelligence. Men of steel, hard men of acute mental ability await a rebirth. They have learnt to die for freedom at last. They have now to be taught how to act for freedom since the fear of death had ceased to hold them back. Passions that lead a people from fire to fire are easy to rouse. Actions that demanded discipline and routine for their success require a planned approach, a machine builder's precision and steady painstaking work. All this and more India expects of her heroes. Perhaps she will not have idolised them in vain. In July '44 Subhas Chandra Bose addressed Gandhiji in the following words:

"Nobody would be more happy than ourselves, if by any chance our countrymen at home should succeed in liberating through their own efforts or if by any chance, the British Government accepts your 'Quit India' resolution and gives effect to it. We are, however, proceeding on the assumption that neither of the above is possible and that an armed struggle is inevitable... India's last war of independence has begun. Troops of the Azad Hind Fauj are now fighting bravely on the soil of India and in spite of all difficulty and hardship, they are pushing forward slowly but steadily. This armed struggle will go on, until the last Britisher is thrown out of India and until our Tri-colour National Flag proudly floats over the Viceroy's House in New Delhi."

If he is alive in this significant period of our history he cannot remain absent from the scene of action for long. If he is dead, then the men and women he organised and trained must redeem his pledge.

## 9. Bhagat Singh's Anniversary

THE Punjab used to mean its jails—Ambala and Lahore. On the 22nd of March 1946, it meant Bhagat Singh. Kulbir, his brother, called me to Bunga, the village where Bhagat Singh was born. On the 23rd and 24th of March every year, its peasants gather there to commemorate his death.

On my way to join this gathering, I thought of all that Bhagat Singh had meant to me and my generation. His political philosophy of action shook the adolescent Indian generation of '29 to '31. The last ripples of Bhagat Singh's movement merged into the rising storm of the '42 revolt. When with two bombs and a few revolver shots he disturbed the sedate sanctity of the Assembly Chamber, I was also disturbed, because I was there; I watched him being led away. Young India thrilled at the courage of one who deliberately refused to escape and chose to propagate the gospel of 'Do or Die' as he understood it. Later when I heard him fearlessly proclaiming 'Long Live Revolution—Down Down With Imperialism' in the small courtroom of the Delhi District Jail, his voice struck untouched chords of the inner being, that was dosed with complacency fed on Anglo-India's cheap dope. The originator of *Inquilab Zindabad* looked the blustering Magistrate straight in the eyes, when he ordered handcuffs on the prisoner. Once the hands were in chains, he repeated the slogan.

Bhagat Singh was a revolutionary who believed in preaching the theory of Revolution. In organising the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army and Nav Jawan Bharat Sabha, he linked every act to the current events of the day.

The Simon Commission agitation led to Lala Lajpat Rai's death and Saunders the policeman was shot. The Government



was enacting in 1929 special 'security measures' and the bombs fell. Also he was no isolationist revolutionary. To seek mass support, he offered himself for trial—against all the traditions and conventions of terrorist organisations. Again, when Gandhiji offered to rescue him from the 'hangman's rope' if he gave up faith in violence, he refused to recant. He who would gain his life must lose it. Bhagat Singh did not pretend when he said he believed that it is right to kill one's enemy.

As the political prisoners marched out of their jails in 1931 and walked into the Congress Session at Karachi, the news came that Bhagat Singh was hanged. Irwin at one time almost submitted to Gandhiji's intercession. But the Punjab Governor of the day, rumour says, threatened to resign. Bhagat Singh dead, inspired men and women to break their faith in British goodness. He became, for thousands, a symbol of ruthless resistance.

#### LAHORE-AMRITSAR

Lahore Congressmen were in a quandary. Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code prevented public meetings. But a workers' meeting gave me the chance to make a business like survey of the years since August 1942. The Coalition Ministry's troubles had begun and with them the problems of Congressmen in office. Maintenance of Law and Order works out to the advantage of neither one nor the other. The Muslim Leaguers' threats to disrupt and the lower bureaucracy's obdurances are Punjab's major headaches. Congressmen are generally speaking politically unemployed. And everyone feels the Congress must grow into a living organisation. Peasants and workers should swell its ranks. But for some unanalysed reason, vacuums don't get filled up.

The '42 struggle found the peasants of the Punjab busy sending recruits into the army. The masses did not share the frenzy of their fellowmen elsewhere. The groups and sub-groups, there, need not split up into islets of mutually hostile camps; posing individuality is a mere bogey. A common purpose, sincerely held, is the best solvent for sectarian pique and prejudice.

Ambala, Khanna, Ludhiana, Phagwara (Kapurthala State), Julundur and Bunga were district tours and therefore more significant. There is something remarkably sturdy about men and

women who wait patiently for long hours after midnight or under a scorching sun. 'Jai Hind' and 'Netaji' are on every one's lips. The I.A.F. and R.I.A.S.C. men in uniform proclaim their nationalism openly. In comparison with other provinces, the Punjab is weak in volunteer organisations. Students and women still sport Manchester textiles. There is a great zest but not enough fire. The province did not experience the churning of '42. Perhaps that explains much. The Akalis again are unhappily divided. The anti-national Akali is more powerful than the nationalist. The former speaks and acts in the name of the community. If the 'Coalition Ministry' Age, does not fulfil its 'milk and honey' pledges soon, the "Quit India" madness may return and break out ill-timely.

Bhagat Singh's Punjab has been a stronghold of the British. But it has also produced scores upon scores of revolutionaries.



## 10. Delhi After Three Years

MARCH-April '43 was so different. Gandhiji's three weeks' fast, the Nation's frenzy, the rulers vicious obduracy—what if Bapu had died? His return to Delhi today brings up old memories. But why be morbid when he comes to preside over the Liquidation of the British Empire? Attlee is not Churchill, Lawrence is not Cripps; '46 is not '42; Wavell is not Linlithgow; that is part of the *sutra* we must recite; but *New Delhi is New Delhi*.

There lies the snag. West of Suez the Whiteman has White (pure white) standards. East of Suez, the illiterate lazy native brown-black rabble alters matters—circumstances alter cases. The optimistic go pessimist; the pessimists grow pensive. The realists face realities unconcerned, busy, talking to small men about small things—but they are few.

The graveyard of ancient dynasties, will New Delhi be the burial ground of Anglo-Saxon imperialism? Not if New Delhi rulers (direct inheritors of the East India Co.) can help it. At best they will tolerate a change in the managing agency. They are busy convincing their well meaning Cabinet bosses that India needs to be saved from herself. Socialist Britain may have undergone a change of heart. The White Sahebs of the Empire have hardened theirs. Gandhiji and the elders have come here full of faith in British good intentions. What if a handful of patriots remain imprisoned, I.N.A. officers and other ranks, no more nor less guilty than their three released leaders, stand treason-trials? Law and Order is *mantra* here, that brooks neither logic nor justice. Law and Order is a concrete perquisite of conquest. The conqueror's Law and Order cannot be liquidated voluntarily nor devolved with

grace. Between conqueror and conquered, surrender is the function of the latter.

Even those who say freedom has been won seem to be subconsciously oppressed with this awful slave tenet. In negotiation or compromise, the ruled should surrender both person and principle with grace, not the Ruler. The strong must not be opposed with the philosophy or weapons it uses. Plausible arguments of statesmanship are always at hand to drive the lesson home.

"Can we combat the atom bomb?"

"Should the weak in their wisdom of slavery provoke its fury?"

"Are not violent destructions shocking to contemplate?" etc., etc.

Death from malnutrition or hunger is a more silent and therefore a more civilized process. It calls for refined sympathy afterwards, and a well regulated spurt of dignified planning. It is almost parliamentary, constitutional death, and cheap, confused passion need not break any bones about it. The jackals are there to crunch the bones.

However, I must hurry and then catch a train or a plane or whatever will take me a thousand or more miles away. You have no right to disturb the quiet of negotiation-chambers with crude talk of vital men whose souls are being slowly killed while their bodies grow flabby or emaciated with corrupting passivity. Live in death-chamber process too should go on undisturbed. Live in hope. Thorne and Co. may administer oxygen at the last minute and a revived corpse may need such attention as I and my kind can best give.

### "KANGRESS" WINS

The Delhi Congress is a healthy Congress. Its average is good. The 'ward meetings' met after three years. The need for a radical change in the Delhi Administration in an interim period was the main theme. The C.C.'s rule must end as Section 93 rule had ended elsewhere. The Chief Commissioner must be replaced. An authority equivalent to a Premier in the Provincial autonomy areas is what we demand.

District Boards and obsolete Municipal Administration should



be altered. No more official President and nominated members. There must be purges too perhaps, for small people see the face of freedom or slavery in the persons of the least of autocracy's underlings. And Ramjilal Bandhu (17 years of jail to run still) and Ramswarup (9 years) and Swarup Singh (7 years) must be set free. They believed what they heard in 1942.

The Congress worker wants "directives". Will these do?

Set up Mohalla Committees.

Refashion the body of volunteers.

Then and then only will the C.C. Quit Delhi and the British Quit India.

In the Congress elections, return delegates who represent honest patriotism and choose Committee-men whose work-capacity is at least eight hours a day.

The 'influential citizens' of the Congress, the 'good men', the merely 'sincere' men will no more do. They will only be good and sincere, they will have time for Congress only when they have nothing else to do. Such people must take their places in the gallery when the ceremonies are performed.

The last phase of slavery is the first phase of freedom and the healthy confusion that fright may call chaos, will not suit them at all. The Congress day, in the dawn phase of liberty must be a twenty-four-hour day. It contains no restful programmes of etiquette and exchanges of courtesies.

Rural Delhi was neglected by Urban Delhi. But the *Ghosis* and *Gowalas* have suddenly put in a strident reminder. In villages Jheel Kurenja and Kilokri, the milk-supplying Gujar-Jat tax-payers' grievances are genuine. Freedom here has to fight fodder black-marketeers, bribe-takers of all kinds, for, before the village can sell its milk to the city it must conform to the city's standards of sanitation as well as corruption. They have to fight inflation and middle-man greed. I found the sturdy *Gowalas* and *Ghosis*, men who have inherited their strong bodies from honest peasant workers who have worked for thousands of years, exasperated, angry, resentful. But they responded to suggestions. They went in a body to the Assembly Hall. They formed a Sangh, seeing the advantage of a simple guild organization. On an assurance through the Congress *Numainda* that the "authorities" would

supply them cheap and good fodder and look into their other demands, chief amongst them being a rise in the controlled price of milk within a week, they decided to resume their trade which has more of labour than of profit in it.

When they protested and also when they made up, the shouting was *Gandhiji-ki-Jai* and *Netaji-ki-Jai*. Satisfied that *Kangriess* would now be there to appeal to, they left the meeting. There was no Hindu and Muslim here. The demand was everybody's, the trust in *Kangriess* was common. The Muslim agent of the Hindu Halwais was the common enemy. That was the end of the milk-men's strike.

From R.I.N. to the milk-men, was it bathos? Democracy is many coloured; crazy unless you see different coloured rays together in a white beam—the common man's need of social justice.

But strike stories are so many and so dull after all. They are but faint stirrings of life in the lifeless. Had the textile workers of the D.C.M. not received a sympathetic hearing—Delhi would have been in the grip of a big labour strike and strikes are infectious. Labour grows more and more conscious of the righteousness of its cause. The sheer iniquity in a system that stops him from staking an equal claim on the employer's profits, offends and infuriates the active manhood in the worker. Harnessing his anger and directing his energies so that he may not be just a misanthrope or a fate obsessed sufferer, that is our job—the Congress job. There is much that could be told in detail, but time has to stop sometimes. (We who run, also read Aldous Huxley!)

New Delhi is all astir. Clash of interests exposes contradictions of greed. The "situation" is "Intriguing" and "Fluid" say some who cannot see it as amusing. The Camp Followers of the Powers that are, feel perturbed. Will the deal go through? When is the Zero Hour for manifestation of transferred loyalty? Too late, will be awful, for others may have muscled in on the juiciest jobs. Too early may be dangerous. Correct timing is what is wanted—the gracious talent of the racecourse which helps you to back the winner at the best odds. Give us tips, give us tips!

New Delhi is very busy, in between living in the gentle-lawned houses and seeing the correct people. But there are others equally busy, men and women searching for Utopia. They are beginning to give up day dreaming. Inadequate and zealous, they seek in the



present moment the answers to centuries of dead inactive years. They must serve; they must live. And for living, you want a faith. On the policeman's strike, on the medical girl students' protest, they will build a faith—an argument—feeder roots for freedom's definition in terms of righteous resistance.

## 11. Railway Receptions

ANALYSING the class composition of railway station gatherings is not easy. But they are all keenly freedom-minded (not synonymous with political consciousness). A rumour or a newspaper report brings them to railway stations. And they do not always get uncontrollably excited; they are different from station to station. Individually they express in sober speech their desire to know what they should do to bring freedom home. Not curiosity alone but the need for information makes them come—it is up to the travellers to give out definite directives to secure links for a chained reorganization of the forces of freedom: it is for him or her to decide whether the bonds will be bonds of fraternity or those of hero and worshipping.

This train platform audience has its own laws. It has its fifth column too in the railway staff who always head them to the right window, overlook punctuality now and then, in the matter of waving the green flag, and become indulgent towards foot-boarding enthusiasts. Also, spontaneously emerges a travelling office, complete with newspaper reporter, private secretary—in other words, some manager-minded individual undertakes, all unasked, the mechanical duties necessary for conducting a political tour with success.

The railway worker is at present keenly aware of the impending dismissals and cuts. He is anxious to know if he should strike, and when. If he does, how long will he have to hold out, what will the Congress do about it?

The about-to-be-discharged army men and airmen plead for a newer understanding. "We were not mercenaries; tell us where you want us to report for national service; we will fight now not



against but for freedom";—and they are not afraid of saying this to opponents of H.M.G. even when uniformed in its livery.

The town patriot cries for a programme of work. He feels the need for a change in the structural frame of the Congress, a new plan and a new inspiration to work the plan. He can sense much, but cannot see clearly where exactly to fit in his altered self. Polling booth work has no attraction except to popularise the struggle idea—the constructive programme has as yet not been constructed; he hears everyone talk the same language, give bold and heartening talks but when the sound of talk subsides, he is faced with a vacuum. And the poor man wants simple plans, terse directives to get them fulfilled, a *TIMETABLE* and resources for working efficiently, a living wage, and an initiating, task-taking hand at the helm.

## WORK AND LEARNING

These sum up the cursorily felt experiences of journeys since my return. If I had more leisure to ruminate I could perhaps give details that co-workers should learn. But work and work only is the best teacher, learning only a hand-maiden. So while we work let us learn. And I have learnt a valuable lesson in these first few days of open movement. The people want to be free through resistance and struggle, through effort and defiance. Their slogans are not as meaningless as we are apt to think. In them you find a reflection of their choice. They raise *Jai-Naares* to the men of action in their political pantheon. They begin and end with *Gandhiji-ki-Jai*. In between come Subhas Babu and Jawaharlal, Shah Nawaz and Sehgal. But the dead men of '42 are their favourites. Why? Because they and those dead men are kith and kin, flesh and blood.

If propaganda should mean knowledge-spreading and if it is good that information regarding our policies and programmes should get known to the plain man through speeches rather than literature, then advertised train journeys of known workers have a purpose other than merely arriving and departing. The excitement and noise of the crowds, their *darshan-mania*, their feeling touching gestures have increased of late. Leaders have a right to register irritation and administer rebukes against this. True, discipline and its value in moulding and transforming social habits should be stressed, but isn't there a time for everything, as the say-

ing goes? When long-lost-to-sight people travel, the common folk who rush up and noisily demand audience—can it not be that they claim what they have a right to? How ridiculous the mightiest would feel if their authority to speak for the people were unrecognised, their championing of them unendorsed?



who through the tortuous corridors of the sub-conscious. Human minds are delicate instruments. Once the balance of emotion and reason is disturbed it takes a lifetime to stabilise the equilibrium. And what is the value of political or any social activity if it denies to the individual the feeling that it is achieving and fulfilling the urge of his being? Active participation in shaping and constructing an instrument to collectivise energies is a condition precedent of all group work. Its aim varies with men and women of varying ideological beliefs. When individuals who gather to further a more or less common objective are reduced to the position of spectators only, whose role alone counts, they begin to wonder if there is something wrong in the scheme of democracy.

Calling up members of the A.I.C.C. only so that they may give their approval to plans executed in their name puts them to a severe test. The need for discipline and the need for solidarity limit their capacity to examine the issues without fear of bringing about disruption. Whatever its technical implications, it would have been better to take for granted the A.I.C.C.'s acquiescence rather than hustle through its brief session resolutions that could not be discussed in a framework of freedom. The constitution of the Congress permitted, according to its erstwhile General Secretary, nomination of Government members on its Executive. If so, why this play-acting and show of consulting Congress opinion on this subject. Not content with forestalling decisions of a vital nature, the elder statesmen sought popular votes on issues merely to satisfy the formalities of democracy. This resulted in waste of time, money and energy. This resulted in the minds of most members, a growing sense of frustration, a sense of futility. The vast advantage of belonging to a great community of men and women pledged to work for a new order lies in mutual exchange of thought and experiences. By ruling out all chances of such discussions when they met during the A.I.C.C. that organisational unity which holds Congressmen together is about to melt. Let those who have ears to hear take heed. This is not destructive criticism. It is a plea that every time the A.I.C.C. meets its members be provided an opportunity to do more than provide votes for ratifying decisions taken by the executive. Matters pertaining to Congress organisation, its programmes and the larger policies arising out of these should be discussed and decisions taken. A moribund Congress is what the pure power politician aims at. On the other hand, creating a Con-

## 12. Pedantry in Politics

WHAT is pedantry? It has been defined as setting an *extraordinary* value on that which we can do and that which we understand best. There must be other definitions. This definition sums up most accurately the attitude of those in authority in the Congress. The assumption of superior wisdom strikes one forcibly in the exhibition of irritation and anger on the A.I.C.C. platform. In the last Bombay as in the Delhi session sweet reasonableness, so extolled as a virtue by elder statesmen, was marked by its absence. Sober politicians when challenged reacted as vehemently as the tyro. They did not meet their critics' arguments with counter-arguments. It was either a lecture to a set of cheeky school folk or a jeer at men of small understanding. Or it was a jibe against the much looked-down-upon speaker who insists on addressing himself to the gallery. Not being accustomed to the ways of democracy in action, listening to these speeches from afar through a microphone fixed in another part of the building I wondered if this was the normal. Can't men in office face their opposition without arrogating superiority? Why must it be always a matter of the wise *addressing* the un-wise? If this is inevitable then democracy has as yet many milestones between it and its goal. In the ethics of democracy if anything counts, it is respect for the other than your own viewpoint. Disagreements may be expressed forcefully with much heat and passion that depends on the temperament of the individual. But to import contemptuous treatment into controversies around matters on which there is a difference of outlook is hardly in keeping with democracy's biggest asset, the sanctity of human personality. Sensibility once attacked, recoils. Very often its results mar the harmonious development of the mind. Its repercussions often



gress that will enclose within its organisational structure energies leading up from every hamlet and town alone makes working for it worth the while of others to whom power for its own sake has no meaning. This may not be elevated wisdom, but this is the view of one who had accidentally strayed into the higher reaches of the Congress organisation.

A static view of life is repellent to me and my kind. If we are unable to make the Congress move out of its ruts, we must not remain rooted in them. Beyond its set rim the peasant and the worker are calling out for organisations that will reflect their *Life, Needs* and the instruments for fulfilling both. Those of us who have been deaf to their cries and blind to their plight can turn to them now and convert the urbanised bourgeoisie dominated Congress for fulfilling their purposes.

The Delhi Congress world was turned into a beehive. Filling every nook and corner of the A.I.C.C. were the rank and filers busy as bees so that for two days Congressmen invited to the meetings may live comfortably and yet in simplicity consistent with their calling. They were housed in college dormitories and class-rooms. The camp kitchens were supervised by *Seva Dal sevikas*. Volunteers maintained law and order within the camp area. More emphasis must be laid on building up interprovince links in all the fields of work. Men rich with experience and special knowledge should hold classes for the benefit of those who cannot travel to the far ends of the earth in search of knowledge. Old friends of the "underground day of '42" met with warmth and moist eyes betrayed their feelings more than words. The camp life should have been enriched by inter-camp gatherings.

There is everywhere an evidence of parochialism, caste and sub-caste 'isms'. We can destroy this by eradicating these tendencies during occasions of this nature. Let us in future seek to perfect ourselves so that our gospel may ring true.

In the Congress Socialist Party Executive meetings much light was thrown on its efforts at building the new Congress of its leaderless dreams. Province-wise reports were read and assimilated. Strong here and weak there, nevertheless its cadres are springing into activity almost in every field of work that is considered essential. Stemming as it does from the Congress trunk its branches cannot be different in genus from the parent body. There is much

good material within the C.S.P. pulsating with new energy, eager to pledge itself to the realisation of a socialist India. It suffers somewhat from handicaps inherent in the parent body. But the new determination in its leaders to overlook controversy and concentrate on work among the masses and reorganize has produced good results.

As the train came into New Delhi I thought of the change that had come over it since I left it a month back. Was it no longer Imperial? Was it really the seat of a national Government, provisional but undoubtedly national? On the surface Delhi is no more or no less Imperial than it was before the 2nd September. Under it, if there are any, no one knows as yet. For the sensitive the sight of the Union Jack flying on the Red Fort just as before, and all the emblems of the old order as irremovably as before, conveys nothing but realisation that gradualism and its ways cannot excite national imaginations even if it can alter its destiny. Inwardly time alone will tell who won in this round of post-war politics—the British or the starving millions. To the uninitiated it seems that the latter's freedom is as yet a far off event. British power in India has gone underground. It will in devious ways seek to stave off utter destruction. To fight a subterranean enemy requires much more skill and preparation than one whose actions are blatantly obvious. Lest we forget ourselves in make-believe assurances it is good that instead of New Delhi its surroundings should loom large before our mental eye.



them enormously. There is a limit to irreconcilability and 'bravado' they declaim. Grappling with self-life and its many problems as high realists, they arrogate to themselves the privileges of sitting in judgment on people who according to them live and thrive on pure romantic enthusiasm. In this artificial and thickly peopled scheme of human existence it is ever so hard to keep a firm grip on one's integrity.

Passing through a long procession of crises our national struggle has arrived at a turning point. It has either to turn into the by-lanes of economic and social struggles and fight the entrenched enemies of the people or dissolve itself into nothingness. Among the enemies of the people, the strongest will be those who (according to plan) may plot constantly on behalf of the British. Abdication of privileges acquired through force usually follows when counter forces to wrest them have operated with success. British reactionaries and diplomats have decided to make a show of abdication in accordance with the rules of their game played in the name of democracy. They won their first round when they secured Gandhi's goodwill. They almost lost it through the stupidity of their proconsul and the intrigues of their bureaucrats here. Quick to sense a diplomatic disaster, should nationalist India go into rebellion again or on the eve of the next war, they changed their 'line'. They stumbled into such a clever move that they can scarcely contain their satisfaction at their big success. The success is contained in their cornering of the Congress, of securing it in their pella. The very announcement of their decision to abdicate has compelled the leaders of the Muslim 'Nation' to wage a violent 'communal war'. This is a bigger dividend than any they expected. Very soon if this war proceeds in accordance with their hopes they will proclaim to the world, perhaps at the "Peace" Conference itself that they were and are willing to abdicate their privileged position, but never can they abdicate their responsibilities. Should British troops and British officials therefore not continue? But such an interpretation again may be described as springing from doubt, suspicion and fear. The British mind, it will be pointed out, has sprung to heights of sound reasoning based on a revolutionary alteration in its political ethics. It has softened its heart at last under the impact of the Socialist ideals of its governing class of the day. The fear of Sovietised Imperialism has forced Britain to make peace with rebel India. All these and similar are the argu-

### 13. The New Reality

ANGUISHED contemplation of times when terror and heroism clutched at the heart, is a neurotic mental preoccupation. True, the common run of men do not waste their time thus. And the bulk of fighters whether in wars or rebellions are sprung from the common fold. But on the fringe of this militant circle, sit brooding men and women—an uncommonly common set of individuals. The pale cast of thought falls as a shadow between them and the rest. It extracts from them the bitterness of disillusion and imposes an awareness of defeat on what appears superficially a triumph. Even when the bulk is ready to be bullied into belief these suspicion-ridden folk intervene and inject into them their own doubts. By some they are looked upon as cantankerous pests. The wise treat them as specimens of frustration. The kind among the wise are humane in their treatment of them. The irate ones among the great get irritated. And the political parvenu's reaction to these non-believers in "all is well with the world" is one of contemptuous superciliousness.

In the dark trenches of the human mind there must be many unexplored sub-trenches. Will psychology some day reveal the entire gamut of motives that initiates socially significant acts of men and women? The political parvenu's impatience with those who "cannot see because they will not" is the most piteous by-product of a phase in which the profound is completely camouflaged by the superficial. Squeezing truth out of an intricate socio-political complex is a laborious task. When soft-spoken short-cut formulas can suffice why dig into a situation and fix upon the gloom beneath the glitter? These optimists' zest in life is so overwhelming that argument or action that destroys their smugness annoys



ments daily doled out to the irreconcilables, the irrationalists.

We who insist on seeing in the present change of tactics only another imperialist bluff must not hereafter waste time building up our own or provoking in others arguments about British motives. We had better study realities as they will emerge from now on. The new reality has at the moment expressed itself in death and disaster of thousands of Indians. Fratricidal strifes are tragic enough. But when an enemy gloats on the scene and chuckles over a family quarrel, it is humiliating. I must confess that for a brief while I was the victim of wishful thinking. In all sincerity I believed for a moment that having found the Britisher playing his traditional game of double crossing, the Muslim League would fight him and also give up its anti-national goal of partitioning the mother country. Indians who followed the religion of Islam, I thought, had done with reactionism. I imagined that they would coerce their constitutional leadership into fighting India's freedom. I thought Muslim youth's healthy instincts had at long last been stirred. They would, it occurred to some of us, join such forces as were working for raising the level of the common toilers on farm and in factories. But this was a short-lived illusion. It was pure wish being father to the thought. Small-minded men had mesmerised a type of Indian Muslim for too long. He has been misled and will be a little pawn in the small minded leaders' scheme of self-worship. And he must die and kill his kith and be killed by him so that his leaders may live and grow and flourish to the full stature of their stunted frustrated personalities. Be that as it may, we will again serve no social purpose if mere criticism is to take the place of action. The safest method of analysis both in economics and psychology is to fix the attention on what is done or not done rather than what is said or not said. This formulation should be for all activists the golden rule. Let our indignation at the doings of the ill-intentioned or misguided not get the better of us. Let League leaders deny all responsibility for "the goondas" acting on what they had suggested. Let the blood of the innocents not be on their heads. Fate's blandishments claim new victims daily. If not hunger then the bullet or the knife—the end is the same, annihilation. It doesn't matter very much how it comes.

The work that faces us if we are to take our share in remodelling the future of misdirected Indian Muslims is enormous and urgent. We must first convince him by work not word that in the freedom

we seek he will attain the same totality of liberty as any other national of the Free Republic of India. Socialising political power, we must assure him, will result in developing his strength as a social economic unit. The workers, the peasants, and middle classes will enjoy all the privileges denied them hitherto. Our landed gentry and industrial magnates whatever their religion or caste will on the other hand have to divest themselves of all the advantages they were able to secure in a system that worked for their exclusive benefit. The Muslim peasant and worker in their day-to-day struggles are unattended. They as distinct from their other fellow-sufferers get the worst of both the worlds. While the non-Muslim has been influenced by political and social movements of the century and has grown dimly conscious of his rights and responsibilities, the Indian, who is a Muslim has been subjected to indoctrination of ideas wholly inconsistent with his social and economic well-being. Taught to look upon the foreign exploiter as his friend and his own countrymen enemies, he is in the grip of fear and hatred. He has been isolated from progressive influences; his fanaticism has been trained to shun modern thought by leadership that thrives because he is ignorant. Rescuing him from exploiters of human credulity, religious faith and crude passion will be a hard task. Again, all the means we adopt for drawing him into the circle of revolutionary thought and action must be free of all prejudice and condescension. It is the same with those called Harijans and others who have been forced under strange tribal laws. Our interest in them must focus itself so that as nationals of a nation struggling to be free they may share in the struggle and enjoy in any case the fruits of freedom. Work and not mere words, organized effort and not mere literature and propaganda, and bold and frank affirmation of our social faith can pull out of a dead centre, vital and vigorous members of Indian society. Lack of a full-blooded attitude of viewing communalism as anti-social and antiquated is largely responsible for the foreigner's success in dividing Indians. While uniting us in slavery the British have taken good care that India in freedom disintegrates into mutually belligerent groups. Conditions today have brought us to a new crisis in our affairs. If we can foil the enemy's plan to drive us out of the heritage of freedom, to deny us our total birthright, we shall not have lived futilely.

Bathed in sacrificial blood India's spirit cannot be in bondage



for long. If the sacrifice has not yielded the good we dream of, may be, a different quality of immolation is necessary.

Streets littered with corpses, homes reduced to shambles, flesh torn and dripping, are they not enough to satisfy the God that "must char the wood ere he can limn with it"? Can he be seeking not blood but burning zeal or social justice transformed into service for the weak, and overthrow of the strong? Whether we are walking into freedom or into a trap, wariness is necessary either way. Should freedom not mean freedom of the many, its significance will be negligible. The bigger freedom we can only win through eternal vigilance and work. The running stream knows no rest. The stars in their travel through the heavens know no weariness. Only the spirit of man follows a chequered course. When will it acquire unfettered freedom?

## 14. Nectar Turns Poison

THE call of political duties pushes one about incessantly demanding one's time and attention. If we were not burdened with humane indignation at the social and political conflicts in the affairs of man, life would be simple. Non-conformity calls forth a price. It confronts us with problems that need serious thought and instantaneous action. The initiative to do good acts springs more readily in this non-conformist type of mind than in those that submit to the inevitable, inevitably. Patriotic ardour is a matter of knowledge and ripeness of learning. It seeks to bring happiness to mankind. When invested with incorruptibility this fervour is a source of good. When wedded to natures that deflect its course towards fulfilling personal ambitions it ceases to be of real value to humanity. Practical well-doing is for those who cannot see, hear and do because they dare not lift their souls beyond the confines of an ignorance-bound existence. Such a guileless people cannot, should not be made into playthings for satisfying our whims of personal fulfilment. We may turn to other than human stuff.

Man is a mournful enough object, trying eternally to look beyond the clouded hill. Making him a pawn in one's own game of self-indulgence is unconscionable. Tolstoy in his compassion for poor man has said: "What an unfortunate being is man with his need of positive solutions, cast into the eternally moving, endless mean of good, evil, of facts, of reflections, and contradictions! Men have been struggling and labouring for ages to put the good all on one side, and the evil on the other. Ages pass and no matter what the unprejudiced mind may have added to the scales of good and evil, there is always the same equilibrium, and on each side there is just as much good as evil." Sailing in a new direction is



never a peace giving experience. The beaten track may be dull walking but it is free of the unexpected. Adventure be it spiritual or physical cannot combine the two incompatibles of tranquillity and exhilaration—at least not for ordinary mortals unversed in mental discipline. If I could stop at just working for a limited purpose these reflections would not ruffle me. Watching a meeting of peasants assembled from over a hundred and fifty villages, impossible vows surged across the willing agent within. And yet was it such a rash desire to want to break "the closed bud-like state" of human minds? In their eyes there was meanness mingled with anxious appeal. The northern peasant-mind is more limited and circumscribed than his brother in the east, west and south. In his expressionless face you look in vain for those innate qualities of power that shine in the Nana Patil men of Satara. His inner attitude is one of naive, anxious, appeal. Why does he beg in silence? What, who has chained the physically grown-up men to youthful bashfulness and diffidence? Why has so much nectar turned poison? Why do they lack the necessary experience and inclination to change their appeal into a challenge? Strong of character in terms of their own unsophisticated code of ethics, they have hitherto failed to register their social selves. Everywhere the peasant community of mankind is a conservative force even though in bulk he is greater than any other single group of man power. Hence to those who are pledged workers in the cause of social justice this large mass presents problems of immense difficulties. In village communities the play of mind-opening, self-confidence-breeding forces is weak. The vast tracts he is compelled to inhabit overawe him. He huddles together for self-protection, the hard life of the sort stifles his mental growth and thus he crystallises into what he is, a silent uncomplaining human beast of burden, full of cares and want.

The Shakurpur meeting had been called for the twin purpose of giving public expression to the villagers' daily growing grievances and for forming a Central Panchayat Committee. In the 360 odd villages around the city of Delhi live men and women who might easily be living as far back as five hundred or a thousand years ago. They had no means before the Congress activated them in 1930, of knowing what went on in the city of Delhi. Stories of the Moghul days of old, and the Great Mutiny are still listened to with much interest. Vaguely they know that the Congress and the

are at war, that the latter is strong and alien, the former weak, but born out of their indigenous needs, a fighting organ for the oppressed.

Village men who had come under Congress influence of an intense nature were politically conscious and well versed in the routine of managing public meetings. The newer recruits were made to speak in support of the resolutions. The chief speaker spoke of the absence of irrigation with much feeling. "Why can't the Jumna and Ganga flow through our fields?" "When will the British Chief Commissioner and autocrat change?" One intelligent young man questioned whether we had received the authority of the several villages for forming such a Panchayat. A fiery orator of village Jheel Kurenja rose to oppose this lone disbeliever in Congress intentions. He called the sun and the moon to witness the fact that but for the Congress they might have been no better than a clod of earth their ploughs turned up every morning and noon. He thundered and spluttered and convinced everyone that the Congress was exercising the authority to reshape the life of their community. The sponsors had acted in their interest and none others'. This sharp rebuke to the doubters and warm tribute to the Congress found the somewhat drowsy audience. Forty I.N.A. men (officers and ranks) wound up the proceedings with their national song. The simple Hindustani was more understandable than the Sanskrit Bande Mataram. The small boys and youth of Shakurpur were in holiday mood. Their enthusiasm was surprisingly fresh. Surprising because in body they were less robust than their elders. This anaemic skinny youth of the nation had neither colour in their skin nor light beneath it—but their eyes were aglow. Veiled women in groups perched on mud parapets of surrounding houses formed a part of the audience. Custom forbade their mingling with men. Shyness kept them apart from this body of strangers, from afar. In seeking to establish an authority for attending to the permanent welfare of the village dwelling Indian, we were covering no new ground. Revolutionary events spring around seemingly humdrum organisations. Better production and better distribution, more elementary education and provisions for a rural health service, a war on socially detrimental customs and unjust laws—these are a reformist's not a revolutionary's tasks. And yet the latter finds it almost impossible to ignore such vital matters. The change in man's outer circumstance comes about in



proportion to the change in his psychological attitudes. The circumstances of cause and effect become concentric. The lines merge one with the other. It is altogether a queer game, this chasing of an ideal on the plane of the practical.

And on the actual freedom front, it appears as if all our first principles have got lost in the proverbial haystack. The talks have culminated in a final award. Had the imposition been based on the assumption that Britain was transferring its sovereignty to Indians, the award might have fulfilled Gandhiji's expectations. But there is no evidence of any "eleventh hour repentance; for the British Imperio-Socialists offering freedom is one thing—if it is being given who dare refuse—and giving you seats under the old hegemony is another. It is adding injury to insult if one may translate words. Robbed of all meaning the FREE DREAM has become a nightmare.

When shall we as a people resecure our lost confidence, our lost vigour, "our lost souls?" "In short measures", whisper those who feel their glass is run. And the turbulent of soul and restless mind refuse to submit to cold reason's cajolings. Impatience is no virtue I grant. But nor can abjectness be justified; patience can be.

## 15. Dishevelled Times

MONOTONY can be agreeable to people who live under its spell. The sameness of one day to another lends a rhythmic quality to time.

They would rather glide than whirl through space. And by and by, men and women prefer a smooth passage to rough unexplored tracts. For them, life lived quietly and patiently is life gone through tolerably. The courage required to mend the wear and tear caused in the process of living comes naturally, instinctively. The hardihood and patience necessary to challenge heavy odds come equally simply. Religious and social precepts, laws governing hard morality, breed lassitude and complacency. The small man addressing the fates exclaims inarticulately, "You win, I lose". The price of rebellion is victimisation. He seldom cares to pay it. He would rather remain perpetually in bondage. And so he has submitted to the stronger Big Man from decade to decade until the Big Man decides to befool and beguile him. And the Big Man out to fool him can be either he who exploits for physical and material ends, or he who has a vested interest in reaching some ideological Utopian world. Big Men of these two categories thrive on the masses' capacity to react. Whether for shiny gold nuggets or hypothetical campaigns for bettering a sickly world order, the little man and the still more little woman are good 'power' keeping it 'dry' is a tricky job. The pull of inertia is stronger than the temptations offered—but clever men would not be big if they could not pit their resources against it. History is nothing if not a record of the Great Man's actions from age to age and clime to clime. He has ruled the small man's minds inexorably and shaped his life arbitrarily.



Empire builder or a visionary dreaming of a brave new world, it has always been the elite, the select who have dominated. The small man has been wretched in the extreme everywhere. It is not because he has lacked leaders inspired with "great Revolutionary" ideas. On the contrary every big tyranny has had its antidote in the shape of an angry protestant elite challenging its authority. But never one has the small man won a total victory. He has fought and perished in wars at the instance of war mongering rulers. He has striven and got killed in revolutionary struggles. But at the end of the effort he has suffered from a sense of universal defeat. In the end, as far as he has been forced to discover that he was the fool. He realises at the end of periodic upheavals in which he gets caught, that his courage, devotion and energy were whipped up to pander to other men's dreams. Those who urged him on to revolution were, he finds, men with "violent attitudes", whose daring optimism is deflated at the first or second reverse. At the end of war after war they face "either way, a vista of wars, oppression and degradation".

... Thoughts travel faster than events, at any rate these days. A nation's freedom lies locked in painful discussions in New Delhi. Oblivious to the brilliant pinpricks of the more revolutionarily inclined, the Elders of the Congress with endless patience argue the pros and cons of the procedure whereby foreign domination may end. Having accepted the sincerity in the foreigners' professions of a change of heart they find it hard to believe that if there was any change it was on their part. They are forced to recognise perhaps that the wolf remains the wolf, sheep's clothing notwithstanding. Having secured a certificate for 'nobility of purpose' from the greatest man of our times, the three Englishmen of goodwill should consider themselves fortunate. Whether India becomes free or not they have received their absolution. Gandhiji has forgiven them their sins. They will quote him everywhere when explaining why their Freedom blueprint was rejected—India's incapacity to swallow the freedom pill will be advertised loudly, pious hopes for a speedy accession of strength will be expressed and this mid-summer day's dream that has lasted from June '45 to June '46 will have ended in a further triumph of British socialist diplomacy. Churchill they say, is mighty satisfied with Bevin's foreign policy; he will be overwhelmed with emotion at Attlee's masterly handling of the Empire problem. Gandhiji

faith in British character will be shared by Churchill. Whoever may have lost, Britain will have won—but that is only 'IF' the elder Congressmen agree to work out this 'freedom' blueprint. Incredibly (and now almost irrationally) I still cling to the faith that the Congress cannot go wrong. How can it dissipate the faith of millions by accepting a false article. Even if genuine freedom cannot come soon why should it slow the pace of action; why sell our birthright to be united and free, for the alternative of remaining divided and *unfree*.

The question of the moment therefore is will the leaders see that wisdom lies in bold resistance rather than a series of compromises? Can they work with reactionary forces of imperialist creation for liberating or rebuilding India? This waiting upon the result of our negotiation warfare has a paralysing effect on Congress men's initiative. They are stilled into inaction. Except for routine duties of a constitutional character, they are silent observers of events. On the other hand Labour in India, as everywhere else in the world, is restive and chafing for action. Strikes are in the air everywhere—Congressman can react through his ministers even if his initiative must abide the evolution of a new policy. But the Congress ministers in the Sarkar's shoes are behaving more and more correctly and less and less like ex-rebels. The policeman's prompt action to drive out labour crowds from the Assembly precincts or "communal" conflict areas, the free use of lathi and the wholly unnecessary firing on 'unruly mobs' puzzles the small man terribly. He himself is neither better fed nor better clothed, he is materially no better off than he was when not Congress but British Raj prevailed. When he agitates he gets beaten and killed—What can we make out of it? Civil liberties have been restored—but again, not so much to him as for the professional politician agitator. Revolutions wax and wane but the little man is nowhere free. And what of us 'Augusters' the zealous fire-eating 'nuclear' men and women of '42? Are we crystallising into a revolutionist aristocracy of the Russian Decembrist class? Have we come to the dead end? Our inflexible will is in danger of being beaten into flexibility. Can we shape events and not be at their mercy? The 'Great Revolution' must not be a wish that may or may not come true. It has to be built—constructed. Informed with the knowledge that fifty thousand died in '42 and many times that number suffered, we at least must be true to them. If in our desire to live and



and work for the cause of the small man we can infuse the will for corporate action, small though our number and smaller still our stature, we can succeed where the Big Men have failed—that is, if we have a clear vision and a clear method of work.

## 16. Magic Mountain

It is all a matter of reaction. How do dwellers on flat land view high mountain ranges? When Hindustan was not 'India' to the Hindi, the Himalayas were abodes where gods lived. It was the kingdom of the Lord of Kailash and his pantheon. Mankind of the low lands looked up to these heights in reverent awe. The birth-place of the Ganga and Jamuna, the home of *Rishis* and *Munis*, the distant hills were themselves personified eminences in his scriptures. Even today the unsophisticated Hindu treks annually to Badrinath and Amarnath, to Gangotri and Jamnotri. Climbing steep ascents for spiritual exhilaration makes all hardships worthwhile. It is still a tryst with Parvati as it was to Shiva. Mountaineering otherwise is meaningless. The contours of huge cliffs should correspond with spiritual protuberances within yourself. The climber's cultural handbag should be packed with legends and lyrics woven around our Himalayan summits. Mountains evoke thoughts of worship, holiness, mystery, magic. You should be Kalidas, Keyserling, Koot-hoomi by turns. That is how the unlettered un-modern man and woman react. That is the healthiest reaction.

But when Hindustan became India it was not merely a change of nomenclature. The Hindi who became the Indian drew apart as a class by himself. His logic and way of life were modelled on "Anglo-Saxon models". The ancient tradition was discarded. The Anglophile Indian saw nothing good in it. And he walked into the blind alley of the Western way. Therefore when the British decided that instead of mythical gods they themselves would



inhabit the green hills of Hind, he threw off his superstitious brethren's outlook. He installed new gods there, gods not so remote as Shiva. Men like gods better when they dispense food, comfort, security and prosperity. And the White gods who ruled India from the heights did that for some. So in the name of efficiency when the Government trekked up to the hills their camp-followers were from the leisured—upper government servant—classes. Hills became stations. Pleasure resorts of the pleasure-seeker, they specialised in providing institutions like cabaret and dance halls. For the overworked to overcome the strain of a hard life, visits to the hills became the correct thing. Golf and bridge, polo and tennis were pastimes consistent with the new order. The European school came into being to dole out "Cambridge" education to the select. From the seat of the gods of ancient lore to the seat of the White rulers of India... Why does the Westerner think of the East as unchanging?

The Simla that I travelled to last week was the scene of high power political conferences. A nation's leaders and its ruler plenipotentiaries were finalising the transfer of power deed. My unimaginative mind refused to correctly assess the occasion. The leaders visited the Viceregal Lodge with an air of grace and urbanity. This struck a wrong note somewhere. Was this the last of an extravaganza or the first of a Revolution? There was something Gilbertian in the set-up. An expression of elegant vacuity enveloped our leaders. They appeared to be convinced that the nation's travail was at an end. The small fire-eater looked smaller when to meet his doubts of British sincerity, the leaders granted him the rights of a struggle! 'When,' 'where' and 'how' queries were hardly put when the Doubting Thomases felt like withdrawing. Almost apologising for allowing such unworthy thoughts to cross one's mind one grew reticent. The British mean to go this time, of their own will, conditioned of course by national and international forces, but go they must and will—this was the substance of our leaders' minds.

Of the bargainer-politician's mind (he who cannot fight is no leader) there were many tales. The most acceptable and understandable being that he was distressed at the thought of the 'third party' quitting. Overbidding is successful only when the price is raised by a party that need not pay. In the Muslim League camp

there was subdued panic. What if the pressure of reality drove the Leaguers to translate their threats into actuality.

In the benevolent penitent ruler-tyrants camp there was secret satisfaction. All was proceeding according to plan. The divide and rule investments of a century and a half were bringing in good dividends. World opinion would certify British *bona fides* if this last noble effort to unite the natives did not succeed. Now when after years and years England decided to declare India free, India refused to take her seriously. And then where is the authority to man the free state of India.

In Simla, therefore I and my kind were complete misfits. We met and talked in public and private of a struggle. We could ignore without much effort the fact that freedom was being achieved. The orderly arrival of that moment when India could establish the downfall of British rule was incompatible with our conceptions.

Our anxiety to prepare for the worst made us plan out a scheme for those who felt the need to work. The people who came to the public meeting were largely those who can be called politically conscious. The merchant and professional classes, the small clerks in the secretariat wanted to know the alternative that would follow in the wake of a 'failure'. Brave words can't make brave worlds. In spite of it one goes on alternating them. Why? In the remote hope that daring and courage once inspired may lead to determination and defiance in action. As the sun set behind the hills in the fading light all those faces that looked down on me from tired heights lost their human form. Hundreds of masks, thousands of eyes closing in on one—was it the magic of the ancient gods at work. But the uncanny moment passes. Collective action of '*Inquilab Zindabad*' broke the spell. Masked heads regained their bodies.

It was Rabindranath's birth anniversary that day. What could I say? But in imperfect Bengalee I offered my tribute to the revolutionary in our great sage poet. In moments of darkness and weakness his songs bring light and strength. 'Jai Hind' was in the air everywhere, even in "Kali Bari".

In the twenty-seven Himalayan States of the hills surrounding Simla, twenty-seven petty zemindars tyrannise over their tenants. They have arbitrary powers.



The peasant subjects are quite unorganised. Political ferment have begun to seep into the consciousness of a few States. At a meeting of workers from these last we discussed plans for creating a unit in every State. The States' Indian is ardently keen on removing the artificial barrier dividing them from us. Congress guidance and its intervention on their behalf are looked forward to. Their "Rulers" interfere in every detail of their community life. The people have no voice in the administration of their State and no civil liberties. Food and cloth shortage, unjust and heavy taxes are a big strain. These men and women of the hill States must be organised to fight for their democratic rights.

In the Solan State after the public meeting, the Praja Mandal was inaugurated. The men, and specially women of Solan looked keen, eager and very enthusiastic. In agreeing to follow such directives as the formation of an Azad Sena, to enrol Praja Mandal members and train workers for work among their peasantry they showed remarkable alacrity.

What should we do if the talks fail was a common question. At the meeting in Kalka, a foot-of-the-hill town and a fairly important Railway centre, it was repeated again and again. Help the railwaymen in their own struggle, draw into your Congress Committee every young man and woman who wants work. Work with a design. Have a common design. Advice such as this does not leave the public cold any more. An immediate response is noted. The railwaymen there are concerned about the impending strike. If the Congress fails to support them now a political strike later will be difficult. But dare the Congress fail?

These after-thoughts appear pointless. In a few weeks from now the new picture of a new ruling group will have emerged. Whether sovereign or dependent for those who have pledged to work for the dispossessed and disinherited a fresh departure is indicated. The Congress fight cannot be over. It had promised *Swaraj* to the people. Whoever stands between them and their rights will be the new enemy. Or will it be the old behind a new screen?

An old woman all bent and withered sat begging on the road through the hills. A burden-bearing band of *paharis* panted up the steep slopes—perspiration steaming down their faces. A rail mechanic blackened with grease and coal dust stopped under a railway carriage. None of them cried *Jai Hind*.

## 17. Half-way House

THAT Indian who believed that out of the Quit India struggle would emerge a new Congress (if not a new India) is in utter bewilderment today. He may or may not have been an authentic Congressman but to him the Congress meant the fighting arm of Indian nationalism. Gandhiji its General, a Saint Warrior; his lieutenants men of tested mettle. These commanded all his loyalty.

By and large, every Congressman recognises instinctively the need for rigid discipline. Firm faith in Congress leadership—they know was indispensable if it was to fulfil its pledges to the nation. And I and many others belonged to this category before '42. Confident that the Congress programme was based on the twin tests of sound patriotism and practicability, we who became active in 1930 for the first time never found it necessary to question their *bonafides*. Even the somewhat sophisticated dissatisfaction of Congress Socialists did not infect us. Their Socialism was generally not understood because it was never explained painstakingly. Also the desire not to disintegrate the Anti-Imperialist Congress machine prevented many a Congressman with socialist leanings from becoming an active "party men". The sturdier elements in the Congress in those days wanted work; they found it. They did not want assurance that direct action when suspended did not mean submission. They knew quite definitely that Gandhiji's passion for freedom could not be stilled. It is this class of Congressman who more than any other is today utterly confused. For, in the high tide period of the national struggle—August-September '42—this naive uncritical faith filled Congressman, along with the masses who followed him, felt justified. He was justified in



his—if I may put it so—Congressism. The biggest mass rebellion was initiated from the A.I.C.C. platform, Gandhiji's constructive workers themselves were drawn into it and fought valiantly. The heavy hand of Imperialist repression fell heaviest on the Congress. The greater its victimization, the bigger its power; the more shining its glory. They would not give up the Congress name, persuade who may, whether they uprooted a rail or cut down telegraph wires they took the Congress flag with them. True, the Congress leadership of the veterans had been found wanting in that it denied us necessary guidance when we needed it most. But even that shortcoming did not dim the people's faith. A younger set of Congressmen had emerged to do their best. The Congress could do no wrong. Long live the Congress. That was how most of us felt—long long ago?

Success and failure, the Indian measures differently from the Westerners. He only can value the worthwhileness of effort unrelated to either. Therefore when by the usual forms of evaluation the August struggle was dead and over he did not feel defeated. Instead of feeling embittered or crushed he felt a little restless, a little sorry for himself, a little annoyed at the heavy odds against which he has to combat.

His disillusionment began later. It started when Gandhiji would not own responsibility; when his Gandhian co-workers fell away from the path of resistance in the name of non-violence; it was complete when the A.I.C.C. sat in judgement on the August happenings without giving the "August-wallahs" a chance to plead their case, and finally it drove them to speak up when the Working Committee disapproved the technique of resistance. Again, when in private the leaders and even co-workers showed irritation with outlawed Congressmen for not surrendering, the fighter Congressman became resentful and suspicious. His resentment is about the past. Admitting the heroism of rebellious India, the leaders had thought fit to condemn the means they adopted for assaults on British power. Admiration they say is one thing, understanding another. His suspicion is about the future. In his dreams he had seen a picture. It was the picture of freedom when British power lay crushed in the dust and replaced by a free Indian state, governed by a body of men and women who would destroy the present slavish forms of statecraft. In it there was no White

A truly indigenous system of rule for the benefit of the village first and the middle class town dweller afterwards took shape before his eyes. He saw another picture also. It was of a new Congress. Scornful of all British-made plans, claiming that full sovereignty must be fought for, psychologically intolerant of every foreigner and his greasy camp followers, a Congress proudly power-conscious. Having suffered a reverse, confident of its enormous reserve of revolutionary power with 40 crores behind it who could not be crushed, this new Congress of our dreams should not have looked in the direction of asking for freedom. We who form the Congress ranks wanted our leaders to take their initiative as free men—ignoring British machinations, not caring to resolve the constitutional deadlock; others only too eager to take up such work could have been found to do this. Repairing the Congress machine, giving a plan and a programme to its battered and beaten but very much battle-worthy members was what we thought our leaders would engage in after Ahmednagar. But in expecting this we were unrealistic, over-confident and almost over-bearing. No, they say. Even Gandhiji altered his classic opposition to parliamentary and office acceptance programme. He grew anxious for the immortalization of non-violence in the hearts of men. This to him was more vital than freedom at any price, by any means. He blessed the initiators of reverse-gear action and questioned the wisdom of those who dared to differ from him. This caused confusion in those ideologically in line with Gandhiji's philosophy. It caused us apprehension lest the fine spirit of death defiance be crushed by its originator.

The simpleton Congressman (Auguster again) was even more taken aback when those who belonged to leftist folds, blocs and parties, began to exhibit 'reformist' tendencies, accepted where they should have protested, entered the election fray and did not see their emergence from prisons take up organisation-building tasks. They saw gulfs in some cases, streams in others, between themselves and well known co-workers. The common experiences in prison *versus* a set of experiences outside, had divided the ranks.

The scene today disturbs the metaphysical and ethical discussion on non-violence and personal incompatibilities provide smoke-screens for differences. Old loyalties lie disrupted, new



ones seek a new mould. And here lies the crux of the problem. Will the Congress become the new mould in which this rich fluid energy can be set or will these new Congressmen be told that the Congress has outlived its utility when the negotiated freedom regime starts working? Whether we can accept half-way house freedom as total freedom is a question that brooks no equivocation. It is either a yes or a no. If the latter, then liquidating the Congress machine would be criminal. But the energy required to keep the Congress from becoming a preserve for those who will vote 'yes' to the above question may be so great, that it might very well be more useful to divert it, to a purely peasants and workers organisation. In every corner of our land the August fighter Congressman is watching the political scene, anxiously, critically. What will the older leaders compromise on? What will the August leaders do to give them what they lack most—a purpose worth living for and fighting for? A machine for concreting their action-plans, resources for converting paper plan into a living social-economic political organism. An organism with a mind, body and limbs. For heartless mechanical men and women in the robot factories or the upper social strata soulless work is possible. But the new Congressman knows that men's and women's hearts stop beating because there is no food in those bodies. He does not want to fight for abstractions. He wants the power to stop the white-brown skinned exploiters from killing with starvation. That is about all he knows about the need for Socialism. And all he need know

## 18. Then and Now

It was the first week of August and the year Nineteen Forty-two. History, it has been said, is past politics. But on the NINTH DAY OF AUGUST politics ceased to be. Its petrification was preceded by months of political animation. But the morning of the Ninth saw the birth of a new revolution conceived on the day that Britain's emissary failed to recognise the national demand, the foetus of this revolution had been growing rapidly—unnaturally rapidly.

Borne as if on a whirlwind, Gandhiji's words spun a magic net. It enwrapped in its folds hearts pent with patriotic anguish, chafing at humiliation, longing to retaliate, to recapture loss of honour and liberty. Every political argument against rebellious action was drowned in the flood of this mental turbulence. Postponed again and again, a declaration of war on Indian slavery was impatiently awaited. The emotional sub-conscious of an entire people was charged with hatred for the oppressor and his allies. Men and women fixed their gaze on Gandhiji, the pole-star of all mass acts. Expectancy at white heat for the inevitable conflict between the ruler and ruled could scarcely have been more palpable, more desirable than it was in that first week in the month of August in Nineteen Forty-two.

From its first day to the eighth, every hour grew from tensity to tensity. Tilak day anniversary programmes contained the first hint of plans and programmes. Rumours of British offensives contemplated against leaders of open rebellion heightened the sense of urgency. Frenziedly we sought for definiteness and direction. The purpose was clear up to a point. News of Britain's defeat in the war wherever she fought increased the clamour that the



blow be struck 'here and now'. Explosive energy demands immediate outlet. And democracy came into operation to provide for the streaming out of the pent-up flood waters. The A.I.C.C. was convened. Its representatives met to hear what its chosen men had decided. As they ascended the rostrum, in oration after oration the leaders explained the demand embodied in the declaration that the British must quit our land. That firmly and clearly worded resolution analysing and summing up India's resolve presented for discussion and adoption or rejection, drew unanimous support for itself. Gandhiji's unforgettable speech, delivered in a silence that was besides the sound of his voice the only other audible sound, burnt its way into the consciousness of his people. Everyone held their breath for the hundred and twenty minutes of his utterance. Every thought glowed with a message and a meaning for those hungering for signals and blueprints and all the paraphernalia of insurrectionary action. Impenetrable uncertainty vanished after he had spoken. "We are to fight them after all" was heard on all sides. Foreign journalists and visitors came as much under the luminous spell of Gandhiji's quiet tones as those who were reining at the leash. All fear was driven away. Courage to face the unknown was born of collective strength. But behind our minds there were misgivings. The enemy's proposed strategy was an open secret to many. By midnight on the eighth of August, telephonic warnings reached Gandhiji and others that they were to be swooped upon and taken away to an unknown prison. This was again common talk. But most of our elders were not agreeable to credit these rumours with authenticity. In offering help to the 'United Nations' in their war to defend democracy, the Congress, they argued, had a faultless case. It could not be rejected summarily. But the people's pessimism proved to be true. The fortunes of Britain's imperial war had all unknown to us changed. Imperialist Britain had therefore decided to crush the Quit India rebellion of the Indian people. Blind to all arguments save those that suited its purpose, the British Viceroy ordered the suppression of the Congress organisation and the imprisonment of all those who might implement its decision of the 8th night.

The cool dark of daylight at its earliest was lighting. Between wakefulness and sleep there are transition moments. These were disturbed that day by insistent sounds of Indian policemen knocking at many a door. They stole into the houses like thieves. Sur-

prise action is of value only to him who puts his strength against the calculable forces of the opponent. Had Linlithgow known what was written on the far horizon he may not have spurned the friendly approach technique of Gandhiji or the only too well-meant willingness of the Working Committee to come to terms—of course, honourable terms. But the Westerner cannot compute what he cannot calculate.

An the grey hour of dawn was about ending I drove through silent streets to Bori Bunder—cordoned off, policed, deserted. The Inspector on duty in the police car had explained, "We have no warrant for you"! I insisted on my right to be a spectator. "You may be insulted", he warned.

This threat notwithstanding, I strolled along the then unfamiliar platform. Uniformed guards in attendance on the special train surrounded one of prisoner-of-war specials. Every carriage window framed a face known, respected and loved by millions. Powerless and far away those millions at the moment were unaware. Otherwise this act of kidnapping could not have been carried out without interference. That dignified show of courtesy would have been spelt—blood and broken limbs would have marred the neatness of the scene. Gandhiji appeared grim and stern. Jawaharlal angry, a loat-in-thought look in his eyes. Whoever boarded that train knew the enemy had struck first according to the rules of his game, treacherously. Pearl Harbour methods are anathema when practised by yellow-skinned Japs. When employed to crush a revolt, they signify forethought and courageousness, rulership! As the train carried away its load of patriot-prisoners, it robbed an as yet asleep people of their friends, philosophers and guides. When they woke up it was to find the state at war with them. Entrenched authority—an usurper authority had decided not to allow freedom of movement, speech or action to natives demanding its withdrawal. The hours that followed the first act of assault were packed with pain, bewilderment, death and defiance. Scheduled to be hoisted by Maulana Azad, the National Flag was awaiting his arrival. On learning of his arrest, the workers were wondering what steps to take when a White sergeant swaggered into the enclosure formed by boy and girl volunteers. His order to haul it down unfurled fell on deaf ears. We went on with the ritual. As the multi-colour silken flag of the nation floated in the air the policemen



opened their mustard gas attack. The assemblage was scattered, but reformed itself into a procession. As it went on to the Congress House, wild and angry men joined it. It was one of the many processions of men and women that defied police lawlessness that day. Turning to look back at the flag, I saw the White sergeant tearing and trampling on the flag that I had unfurled ten minutes ago. I vowed that I would help to tear up British rule. As the day wore on, the fury of the people outmatched the wrath of authority. Armed policemen and military rule was defied by the unarmed. Their story is well known today. Repetitions cannot recapture the valour of the anonymous sacrificer. He disclosed powers of initiative and a capacity for suffering that was never expected of him by anyone, much less himself. This excessive demand on his vitality may have overpowered him. Instead he showed that though without weapons, he had strong arms' grit in his will.

Why am I thinking of a day that is now a memory—memorable but irrelevant? Have we not in intention and practice regretted it? Have we not already regretted, that on and from this day much happened that should not have happened? We who were pledged to force the British to withdraw, are we not being called on to accept "freedom" granted on its terms?

Another A.I.C.C. will soon be meeting. The one that rejected the thought of parleying with the British except on terms of equality has been replaced. Will the new representatives submit to a plan that stops short of our Sovereign decision to be free men, to force the foreigner out of his power pockets, instead of falling into his goodwill traps?

A finality was implied in our asking the British to go. Can we now withdraw that implication by our actions?

## 19. Now and Then

THE wiles of Wavell have won. Indian youth, our manhood, has been cheated—temporarily at least. Their elders have deprived them of their rights to wrest freedom from hands obviously alien, oppressive and grasping. By acquiring the sanction to try out the British way of walking into freedom our men of wisdom have proved their power. But in affirming that the need for conflict had gone since the British recognition of India's Quit demand they have assumed a new character. Men of ripe wisdom, and much experience—they enjoy paradoxically the confidence of even those who do not agree with them. Why should our conquest over Britain, proclaimed the leaders with great sarcasm, not be obvious to the uncompromising dissenters? To be afraid to walk into a trap is to be coward like, neurotic, seeing ghosts that do not exist. Deliverance through struggle and struggle only is not necessarily the only brave way of achieving it. Incensed at the vehemence of those who condemned co-operation with the enemy, our elders grew unreasonably angry. Again supercilious references to 'heroic poses' of revolutionary slogans instead of constructive statesmanship sounded incongruous coming as it did from the lip of the *beau ideal* of the Indian revolutionary world, Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhiji's own hesitation notwithstanding, his definition of his experiment in constitutionalism as 'constructive satyagraha' reduced principles to prejudices. When we want to, we clothe a less worthy motive in rich ideological trappings. When we decide not to follow the straight and narrow path we condemn it as the way on which fools alone walk, on a fool's errand to a world without end.

So, on the sixth and seventh of July '46 two hundred and four



members of the Congress decided to try out a piebald plan to throw the Congress into an orgy of deliberations and discussions. The formalities which 'free' India would observe, were gloriously outlined. Every argument levelled against Congress actionist policies and programmes by the liberals of yesterday was arrayed in eloquent language against such of us as thought otherwise. A new age was ushered in—the age of constructive revolution.

Our generation is dubbed as one without faith, cynical, a 'lost' generation. Is it to be wondered at? The stark issues that confront mankind today are unsolved. Though human blood has flowed freely its potency as a solvent for the contradictions in human circumstance has been proved weak. A faint gleam in the sky here and there is all that is given us. The inner fabric of society in all its essentials continues to be unjust, non-rational. Effort after effort has failed—the small man toiling in his ant-hill civilisation, lives and dies in violent conflict with his fate, suffering hunger and want passionlessly, stolidly. When men and women with faith in a mission have worked these men into a war on their enemies, they have blindly followed these leaders and messiahs. But their dreams came to nothing more than temporary realisations. Intoxicated with their own courage they fought on a hundred battlefields only to find that the end is all ashes and dust. Suspended in those heroic courageous moments, their aspirations glowed like live coals in the inky night. The grey dawn of reality converted them into dead stones, weights on their minds, ugly to look at; reality had no illusions, dreams were nothing but illusions.

"Born in freedom, men will come into the world with thoughts and feelings so free that we who are born slaves have no idea of them". That was how sanguine Heine felt long years ago. But we who are still in the night of disillusion, in darkness forbidding and unrelieved, we who are weary in mind and body, we may not hope, for we know that it turns into fear. This is the tragedy of the lost generation. It has either to melt away or reassert its positives—search for them after serious research.

But in the human spirit hope never dies; phoenix like it springs again and again vibrant with the glow of sunrise to spur it on its way through new heavens. The thought of 'those who come after us' and that we must not betray them, haunts us. We must not seek solace in self pity. Through sacrifice and effort let us work for

victory over an evil order. Amidst all our fears and anxieties let the future beckon us to overthrow the devilish designs of the powerful. We need conviction. Let us refurnish the spirit, reinvest it with firmness, restore faith in ourselves even if our gods have failed us. New gods we shall build, who can eschew the need for them? But more warily, more cautiously.

"Our task only begins on the day when our enemies lay down their arms," says a maxim. If we can steal in upon them while they, off their guard, are unconscious of our nearness, may be, those 'dark iconoclasts' of our dream social order will be worsted. An effort as hard as war will be needed to overthrow these dark powers. Gandhi believes the gloom around him is temporary. The other leaders believe that they will lead us into freedom on the strength of our past effort. We who are skeptical of both, we cannot rest on such hopes and beliefs. Our own tasks, our own objectives should assume vital significance from today onwards. They are different in texture, and they need a different treatment. Power to seek out of the depths of our spent weary humanity, new capacities for forging a new world is our first task. The establishment of a Socialist society wherein man will live on equal terms with his fellow man, our only objective. The enemy of our enemy shall be our friend—that is all we need to know to urge us out of our despair. The more resounding our defeat, the greater should be our *will to grow strong*.

The city of Bombay has witnessed many a national convention. But the Cowasjee Jehangir Hall where the A.I.C.C. met must have reminded its citizens of stories about a bygone fashionable Congress age. Debarred from attending a 'historic' session, crowds lined up at the entrances to the hall. Peering into the fast moving stream they cry out 'Jai...' 'Jai....' Victory to the leaders? That is all that I could read in those cries. If so, they need not have wasted their energy. The leaders had won—the people had not. The bar of history is a matter of the future. Among those who can check up the verdict will be some of us who are alive today. We shall be happy if it finally says: "Now all men have the right to eat".



the goal is to be clear. "To what end"? is asked ceaselessly and persistently. "A society designed on a moral basis" is very often the answer. If further explanation were demanded, the vague reply might be, "the establishment of conditions that ensure maximum social liberty". If vagueness has its faults, it has at least the advantage of non-rigidity, and into this frame-work definition of the moral order all effort that might lead to the ending of man's misery can be fitted. Gandhiji has rebuked us (the Opposition) for betraying fear at the 'dangers' of the official Congress plan. He misunderstood our fears. What frightens us is what he himself has induced with apprehension, those "dangers from within", laziness of body and mind, smug satisfaction, lust for reward for services rendered. Again he has warned us that we shall defeat our purpose if we don't "promise action and results more attractive than what is opposed". Alas, if attractiveness is to be the only quality of what alternatives we propose, then they will be doomed. To fight for political liberty in a series of orderly dignified protest campaigns, to walk in and out of prisons flaunting the badge of suffering, to "constructively" engage in constitution-making while the main theme of the freedom struggle remains unsolved and power rests where it used to, are programmes that are dazzlingly attractive in comparison with what the 'Opposition' has projected.

We who have been called the Opposition may not vie with such spectacular though comparatively easier ways of achieving the national objective. What then is our scheme of wresting power and transferring it to whom it belongs? Gandhiji recoils at the thought of bloodshed, subterranean activity and even total non-violent non-cooperation. And yet, today in office the Congress utilises all these methods (or is party to them) for maintaining Law and order; they together form its matrix of high diplomacy. Had its pleadings for co-operating with the Anglo-Saxons and their allies in their war against totalitarianism caught the fancy of Churchill, the Congress would have made of it a 'holy' war. Blood, secrecy and strife are not to be shunned once you are in active conflict, facing an enemy and his hordes aching to usher in a new age. May be the institution of the Congress will resist the way of insurrection and prefer the method of inculcation for attaining its goal. An amalgamation of realism and idealism ensures efficiency. If the end we seek is more precious than any other purpose in life, a sentimental horror of spilt blood and chaos has to be overruled as

## 20. Our Name is Legion

ABSOLUTE injustice like all other absolutes exists perhaps only in the abstract. Those who believe in its existence along with the other cardinal concepts of beauty and goodness and to whom justice is another name for truth will centralise their thought actions around decisions arising from this belief.

The struggle for survival is very largely a biological struggle. But evolving consciousness has saddled the human mind with an obsession—the obsession of values. The highly evolved therefore carry a cargo of idealised urges throughout life. They cannot see life in the simplified terms of those with un-evolved and therefore un-involved minds. It is not enough for them to live and let live. They must intrude. Loaded with missions and visions they enter life as gladiators entered the arena once upon a time. The gladiator's role, a place of contest, a *central value* as the object of combat, that is all they ask of life. Men and women possessed by the urge for high thinking and purposeful living, they look fantastic, arrogant and quiet abnormal to the average work-a-day human being.

The contradictions of life vary in accordance with the age of its civilisation, its culture pattern. Ideas in conflict produce a bewildering variety of contradictions. And these breed maladies, ailments, social and individual, that require patient cures. But more important than medicines is the prescriber, the healer, socially significant even if inexplicable to those indifferent to the fate of social man. Men and women who act as society's conscience have faced a world in conflict ever since man developed his gregarious instincts. Such individuals have always asked questions. An incurable habit, an uncomfortable attitude to life, it is essential if



squeamishness.

Watching fourteen thousand men on strike brings home sharply the sanctimoniousness in all the talk of avoiding physical conflict. Danger-daring for the love of adventuresome activity may not be laudable. But when removal of the congealed misery of innumerable underfed human beings living in squalor and degradation is the end, to avoid a total struggle between such antagonistic forces as capital and labour would be immoral; as immoral as deliberately upsetting a moral order for the satisfaction of sadistic ambitions. In the grey light of dawn long queues of men and women sit talking beside the common water tap. A thin stream trickles into the bucket, the women watch the slowly rising level impatiently. Flies whirl up from garbage heaps, rickety children crowd round parents whom they seldom find at home for such long hours. In their sunken eyes, there is a sullen look. In their grim tones is righteous wrath. Their affirmation of rights and grievances are serious and sincere. The men on whom depends the industrial wealth of cities are at last cognizant of their power. Latent powers of organisation and discipline come to the surface in times of strike action. The labourers in Delhi have shown remarkable solidarity. Caste and communal prejudices have melted away. Fully confident that theirs is a just cause entrusted to leadership that will not 'sell out' on them.

One for whom the experiment in Soviet Russia is the best in the way of ideological planning has written:

"We are realists, we are in the presence of a miracle: the birth of the new man, the recasting of the conscience, the objectives of enormous human masses. All that is in movement, journeying in the making. Society compels us, participants in an unheard of epoch, to lend a plastic form to its ideas and to its men. Realism is our arm".

Can it be that in this epoch of the small man's rebellion against the tall man's overlordship, there will be a brief period when the old guard will change the people after recording their thanks, mould their own 'ideas' into forms true and beautiful?

## 21. Weapons of Liberty

UNDERPRESS, streaming out of million upon million minds, strength flows out as lava from an active volcano. This exhibition of strength in the toilers on the bottom rungs of society is a miracle. That silent, unobserved, taken-for-granted human being who worked out plans made by the vociferous, exhibitionist and grasping fellow-creature has arisen at last. He recognises in his condition much that he cannot tolerate. He has shaken off the calm of inertia. He has decided to shatter the present social and political relationships. He refuses to defend them. And out of the armoury available to him, he has selected the weapon of refusal, the weapon of REFUSE, an unviolent non-aggressive weapon.

When men take to soldiering they do so because they need a profession. When they fight in a war they do not suffer from a sense of personal grievance. War is to them what a great storm is to seamen—an act of fate. The ideological padding that distinguishes modern war from the cant-free tribal fights of old, impresses neither combatants, nor civilians. The sceptical and ironic do not view these inter-state national dogfights as war for liberation. Regimented men fighting equally regimented men of another nation have as their main purpose bread earning. All other motives are sentimental embroideries to cover the brute fact that man can and can kill man. Political struggles and economic warfare have however a different origin. Conflicts born out of them have a different orbit of purpose. There are in every established social order those who fear change. Such men and women resist the bourgeoisie's attempts to revolutionize existing social and economic relationships. Such 'pressure groups' or revolutionaries want an immediate change. In visionary conceptions of social existence



they say the fabric of society must be built on foundations of personal liberty. They despise an order of affairs in which hunger, and sickness, nakedness and shelterlessness are accepted by those who do the ordering. Controversy on the exact degree of opportunity-sharing may be sharp but basically these groups are convinced of the immorality of the profit motive in capitalist economy. And it is such men and women who as organised units have inaugurated the present epoch of social unrest in India. Today it is no more than the opening weeks of this epoch. For the fulfilment of its purpose we need sharper weapons of liberty. And in fighting for liberty we have to take good care that the idea of liberty does not get confused for want of thought. Arduous mental preparations are necessary for him who fights the battle for food and freedom. The soldier becomes a bad fighter if he is allowed to think. His physical faculties need to be trained more than the mental. But the civilian fighting for ending his economic slavery needs to have an intelligent grasp of the implications of his struggle. They have further to learn to relate their problems to the power problems of politics. They must be taught by those who serve them that in the power of the governed to change their governments, to have known laws as against arbitrary laws and the machinery to acquire the first and execute the second lies the secret of their strength.

The sequence of events swings full circle; from political rebellion to throw out a foreign power to the workers' struggle to wrest concessions from the employer is a very normal routine. When the tub orator proclaimed that the fight for freedom was essentially a fight for food he was almost ridiculed. But now when he asserts that the fight for food will grow into the next fight for freedom, even the congenital scoffers begin to believe. Why? Because the safety-first anti-change individual's personal liberty has been threatened at last. His food and cloth do not reach him with the regularity of sunrise and sunset. The postman's knock is no longer the time signal it used to be. He cannot communicate and grow rich quickly. He is not sure when the municipal services may go out of action and diseases in epidemic form invade his sterilised home. And what rouses his ire and makes his gorge rise is that the underfed, the bedraggled and the imperfect men should have had the audacity to *strike at him* by going on strike.

A new awareness in the workers of India has manifested itself. It cannot be suppressed. It will grow. It must awaken in him not only the capacity to strive and suffer but the ability to detect the self-seeker or genuine political perverts. He is today quite at the mercy of either of these types. The one seeks a career and utilises him for building it up first. Whatever gains the worker acquires, is incidental. The other, the political pervert, serves a foreign power. Nationalism may be a narrow sentiment. But to betray national interests for the furthering of the internationalism of the power-holders is a knavish motive. In our country the real forces that will ultimately destroy the present order have for the first time emerged boldly. The evil designs of the evil, the limited vision of the unimaginative, and the mean ambition of the vulture-like, are threatening to fasten themselves on this emergent energy. Selfless custodians of those hitherto exploited must now reassess their purpose and redraw their blueprint for organising this energy that has welled up so spontaneously.

Strike organisers who conduct themselves with calmness and firmness are rare. The agitator in us is very easily provoked. Wild language and big promises are held out. All this they say is necessary if the strikers' spirit is to be maintained at a given level. I did not find it necessary to do this. On the other hand I think that during a strike period the worker is most influenceable and liable to benefit by educative propaganda. He, unlike the paid soldier, suffers from a constant sense of personal grievance. Therein I think lies a little danger—unless very intelligent, he is apt to be carried away into accepting concessions giving immediate gain at the cost of winning a principle bringing him permanent strength. It took me a long time before I could convince the strikers of the Delhi Cloth Mills that by winning the recognition for their Union and the right of arbitration for their unsettled demands they had won very weighty rights. Their simple minds did not see easily the danger of accepting paternal charities from the employers. When they understood the difference they immediately sprang to intelligent action. "Let us prepare our case and share your tasks in doing so." The thought that the strike had ended and with it their struggle was displeasing. They had won a new weapon of liberty—the organ of their struggle, their Union could not be ignored any more. An impartial tribunal would hear their case and pronounce its judgement. "The sullen dust of their existence" has been blown



off. If we do not help them to polish it to mirror-brilliance it may be covered up again—not with dust, but with dirt.

## 22. Sermonizing and Soliloquizing

UNRECONCILED India has turned another page of history. Ritual and celebration are over; activity organised to reinstate the spirit of the August *yagna* has brought to many, new inspiration. To many others it has brought prison as in Delhi, Madura and Chutala. As the year of '42 merges into the past, its record of mass action will with time's passage become less alive. Young men and women who feel compelled to defy laws inhibiting civil liberties on 15th August anniversaries will be fewer and fewer. Is it to be wondered at, this unavoidable slackening off? The central problem of our times, the freedom problem, has been delegated to realms of wordy arguments. Interpretation of the WORD and its repercussions are the only realities in places where the learned alone dare enter. Those with more brawn than brain and set as if for an inevitable storm are already acclaimed maniacs. They have nothing but a string of negations. They have no positives to guide them! When a subject nation's leaders decide that transfer of power rather than capture of power is the correct objective, the '42 type of action cannot continue to be a laudable model. The "activist minority" so used to the "shatter to capture" methods of '42 will therefore grow for some time, more and more confused. Unable to blend their outlook with that of the elders and yet unable to shake off their deep veneration for the erstwhile heroes, they will search for new men. On these new leaders should they find them, will depend the duration of their days of confusion.

Attempting to sail out into new directions of personal and collective effort, we who cannot reconcile ourselves to the logic of the Forty-two are at the moment like unspent explosives. Instead of engaging ourselves in disputes with those employed in parlia-



mentary warfare, we must set about designing a new lay-out. Our capacity as masters of design and execution will testify our worth. Correct opinions and a noble ideology unless supported by concrete proofs of effectiveness have merely an academic place in human affairs. Therefore, this nucleus of new men and women must first recognise in themselves individuals who have a duty to those whose sharp differences with the elders has left them adrift. Fresh reservoirs of energy have to be tapped, weeding out redundant elements has to begin, before the foundations of a *new brotherhood* can be laid. The new order if it is to be new in spirit rather than in form only, has to draw its strength from all that is still vital in the old. *Truth, simplicity and sincerity* are not to be scoffed at. Age old precepts cannot be thrown away on grounds of antiquity. New liberties need new disciplines. Seeping through every decision and every act, firm rules for personal and public conduct must be drawn up and observed. Thus alone can we qualify for the post of sentries guarding the rights of the weak or soldiers fighting their cause. Co-operative activity and selfless endeavour become easier when the goal is common, clearly envisaged and ardently desired. If the ends we pursue are noble the means automatically partake of their nobility. If the means are more and more perfected the ends cannot but reflect that perfection. Therefore since in the social order we are bent on creating, there will be an end to human inequality, an end to a class enjoying economic and social prerogatives and the elimination of exploiter-ownership, we must fashion our instruments of change with revolutionary intent. Smugness and cant are our biggest enemies—in the long run as in the short. To wage a war on these fifth columnists of reaction we require to be ever vigilant, ever ruthless and unsparing in self-criticism. When the social consequences of our action (or inaction) are likely to be serious, casualness and dawdling complacency is a crime. Everyone out to bend time and space and circumstance into a shapelier model of human existence must face life seriously and pour into his or her work their best.

Looking down from the artist's balcony, life's cavalcade appears bathed in tears and laughter. Detached from turmoil and stress, to observers from a tower, this blend of pain and merriment makes life rich and colourful. Clouds do not persist for ever and always, they say. Sunshine comes sooner or later and chases away darkness. Will the bleak sorrow in the heart of Hemu Kalan

mother, I wonder, ever be driven away? Hemu, the brave resistance-martyr of Sukkur, was hanged by the neck for attempting to remove a fish-plate from a railway track. Were it not a martial law trial he would have been sentenced to three or six months at the most. A youth of eighteen, handsome as a God, the idol of a girl mother's heart, he lived in a humble homestead which has now become a place of pilgrimage. His old grandmother recounted anecdotes from his childhood. This broken, aged woman had seen much that had caused her pain. Unnatural death the sophisticated can explain away. To the simple of heart death for a cause brings no solace. That such a death is a new flowering they cannot comprehend. Distinct from the new generation it is difficult for the old to understand its values. A memorial will satisfy youth's desire to commemorate the death of a hero. But the hero's mother will weep even after it is raised. Tenderness has laws as unyielding as hatred. Pain has an elevating influence. Will it some day elevate a slave people into freedom?

A low hedge of brownish shrubs and barbed wires encircling attuned huts huddled together, a police *thana* on the outer fringe of the fence—it was a "Hur Settlement", seen from a railway carriage window it fled past in a flash. About 3,000 men, women and children lived there under police surveillance. Not allowed any food rations but permitted to go out in search of food within a limited radius, 12,000 members of this "problem community" of Sind live captive lives in such concentration camps. They refuse to believe that their Pir is dead. Their hatred for government is innate and implacable. It is wrong to imagine that they are anti-Hindu. Whomever they suspect to be in league with any Government (even a Muslim League Government) they regard as their personal enemies. Their "outrages" have terrorised the people. But in their hearts the leaders of Sind at least know that repression cannot succeed in taming an acknowledgedly wild and brave tribe. In prison, in detention, in exile, these men and women are sulking. Muslim League ministers have no hesitation openly to assert that the only solution of this problem lies in exterminating the Hurs! And the Hurs are all followers of Islam.

Life to tower-watchers is art when viewed through the artist's binoculars. To those glued to earth it is a tragedy when old and bent and ailing, a man walks on the stage shouldering two loads.



"There are four children in this and two in this", he mumbles as he unloads them. He could scarcely be heard, his voice was so weak. Through the shreds of cloth hanging on him showed a skin dry and wrinkled. He was selling *atta chahnis*. On being asked to reveal what he meant by saying that each of those bags contained four children respectively he said, "If I sell all the *chahnis* in the big bundle four of my children can eat, two if the other lot is also sold. I must sell them before midday. But then you say, you don't need any." He picks up his bundles and walks away. But as he did so he also struck his forehead, an act of desperation at the morning's ill luck. When recalled and asked if he would accept some clothes and refreshment he refused. Only on condition that he repaid in kind would he take cloth and food, he said. Looking up into the morning sky he frowned. He was not happy at having to submit to a smugly charitable, more fortunately placed fellow-being. He talked for a while of the calamities that robbed him of his land, his first born and related how his wife died. Then, picking up his bundles, he walked away, weeping. Gulping down his tears he choked; he was ashamed of these tears. We looked away to spare him the humiliation of knowing that others had seen him in his extreme weakness—why was this old and bent pedlar of *chahnis* cursing the Gods? (but not man). The fear that he may not be able to feed his hungry mouths; fatigue and the prospect of a struggle that can only end on the funeral pyre.

Must freedom come with such hesitating, halting steps? Is there no short and swift way of ending the wrongs of an immoral social economy? Individual heart-searching and meditation often leads, then, into the hermit's cell. Collective thinking, where does it take us? Into a steely structure that will some day set into motion wheels that will destroy the usurpers and the money changers?

## 23. Long Memories

It was a vital pledge: "We declare that we are equal citizens of free India. The British Government is an unhappy memory of the past and we are determined to efface it as soon as we can. British laws are dead and nothing in the world can make us obey them. In place of the British State which we are smashing by going to the fullest length under *Ahimsa* we will create the FREE STATE OF INDIA, independent of domination and caste and dependent only on the sovereign wishes of the people". Not a string of clever platitudes but vital, resolute words born out of continuous action. It was taken by millions before these words were framed. Expressed through the language of mass action the pledge had been taken in combat areas behind street barricades, in village lanes, at vast assemblies hurling defiance. Searching one's memory can be an embarrassing experience. Particularly when the search leads you to either a confession of defeat or a readjustment of your perspective. Our perspective of political freedom had been strictly conditioned till the 9th of August of the year '42 by the British. Every reaction we registered was the result of some initiative in the enemies' camp. Whenever an assault was contemplated we knew more or less the rules and procedure the British would observe. They could equally measure up our immediate objectives and the terms on which they would close the deal eventually. They knew too much, we too late and too little. Non-violent Civil Disobedience did not mean Quit India. Quit India could not be achieved by a limited protest-campaign. Their truth burnt itself in the consciousness of every Indian who took the above pledge by acting upon it even before uttering it. Disagreement in high places notwithstanding, the 9th August struggle for freedom was initiated by



the A.I.C.C. The people's energies once released from the clamping restraint of hard and fast rules of correct revolutionary conduct, flowed out unchecked like flood water rushing forth; it submerged "authority, law and order". Rebellious India for the first time after 1857 drew its inspiration from strength born of the will to be free. Analogies however are misleading when conditions governing events of significance are different. The leaders of the 1857 war of liberation were men trained in the art of warfare; the spearheads of the '42 rebellion were unarmed men unversed in the strategy or technique of counter-assault. The 1857 attempt ended in disaster, this latest effort has ended in a paradox. Romanticism is an integral part of pre-adult psychology. So, though no serious student of man and his affairs dare ignore the emotional realities, we in our appraisal of the '42 struggle must not any more glorify the heroic aspects of that struggle. Nevertheless we cannot, when calculating in cold blood, help taking note of facts that have led to this paradox. What is it? Something essential to the people responded to something essential in the spirit of the '42 rebellion. As if in fulfilment of a profound need from within, they rose to smash enemy power. Undeterred by their own handicaps they withstood the ever increasing odds ranged against them amazingly well. At last it was evident the people of the soil had shed diffidence and dependence, they could stand on their own and fight on their own. But reaction did set in, as it had to, when later counter-revolutionary forces drew nearer and the revolutionary urge receded. A shroud of inaction covered the land, it looked like a final defeat. The weak had lost, the strong had won. But the PEOPLE were not really defeated. The people were not crushed, only gripped by exhaustion. All routed armies need time to recoup. And since the period of recovery is over the people everywhere are restive, impatient, striving, preferring chaos to the return of the old slave status. They cannot reconcile themselves to the assurance of their leaders that freedom has come. In their clamour for freedom through fight there is perhaps more emotion than cold determination. But having tested their own strength they are sure of its potentialities. Having smashed and shattered British rule over some areas they are sure that given an ORGANISATION and a PLAN they can set up their own form of free government instead of enacting a play with the wily Englishman as the sole prompter. They went to spurn his offers of

withdrawal, to prepare and then take what they know they can. A total removal of British power in India is what the people of India desire. That is not how an exhausted struggle-weary people would feel. Hence the paradox. Though outwardly crushed, in spirit they remain both heroic and determined.

But the memory of that conflict refused to withdraw into the shell of history. Even in hearts not attuned to the din and dust it placed respect for it has taken firm root. And to the India that sees in it the beginning of the final fight for freedom, its implacability, its clean ruthlessness has sunk into its very blood composition. Partly governed by reasons, partly by emotion, Indians under its spell ask when and how the un-redeemed, unforgettable pledge is to be fulfilled. Not sterile vengeance but the urge to end slavery inures them to seek means that can establish their own power from the base upwards. Looking forward youth seeks just and incorruptible men who will insist that the means remain pure and yet effective and practicable. To the average Indian, '42 was no nightmare. It was no wilderness out of which he has emerged heaving a sigh of relief. True, that interrupted struggle has halted our exaltation, left us a little confused but it has animated in us a new desire—the desire to derive strength from within. A new decision is forced upon us in this aftermath era. And that decision is to create out of the conflict and chaos of ideas and personalities a new limb to complete the unfinished tasks of political and social change....

Cutting across space littered with water laden clouds alighting on the soil of Sind, the 9th of August Indians' greetings were typical. Boisterous, uncontrollable, but the ring of truth in their voices and sturdiness in their actions marked them out as its votaries. To the newspaper readers, Sind is an opportunist politician's paradise. Or, it is a land where the Hur's tribal passions and codes prevail and therefore no place for the civilised. These are misleading impressions. In Karachi as in every other district town, much nation-uplift work and healthy political activity can be seen. It is not natural that youth generally should seek new magic symbols, and new interpretations of age-old principles. These trials though not peculiar to the Sindhi were noticeably pronounced there. In numerous meetings and meetings with individuals one cannot help observing a people's dominant characteristics. The mystery-loving



youth, maturer men who are devotees to the idea of devotion, women for whom love of country and love of God are equally valuable as inspirations for leading the good life, they all gathered at the meeting places in large numbers. Of the seven cities, Karachi, Larkana, Jacobabad, Shikarpur, Sukkur, Nawabshah and Hyderabad it can be said quite honestly that the average Congressman understands the problem of freedom as a problem of generating fighting power. He also sees in the unrest among the workers the beginnings of the struggle for social and economic changes. He has therefore decided to harness his strength and confine his efforts to special tasks for which he needs a specialist's training. The unlikely rather than the mass has become the object of his attention. But since a mass insurrection is a primary condition of the final struggle drawing the mass mind into sharing our political and social ideology is important work as well. Balancing a programme so that it does not omit the essentials and emphasises the inessential is as difficult as balancing a budget. Training raw youths into expert social revolutionaries requires a school all its own. And to provide such a school was the purpose of my visit to the plains watered by the river Sindhu. I did not mean to originate a school where reluctant pupils were to sit bored and listless, learning routine lessons by rote. I invited only such men and women to form an inner ring in the Congress as would *impose on themselves a new austerity and iron self-discipline*. Our quest to establish a selective order that could lead the whole world if need be, out of its tempests and its deaths into the calms of spring and mental deathlessness, was not in vain. Even if one such individual finds the order, it is enough promise for the future. And many came forward of whose personal integrity one could be sure—if surety ever can be infallible.

The Rashtra Seva Dal has sprung into being in all the Districts of Sind. Regular drilling and marching and providing physical agility to the young is its main function. Men and women who go through this training can acquire habits of mind and body that come nearest to the austerity, self-discipline goal of a true believer in social change. It was encouraging to find Rashtra Seva Dal youths busy training themselves for the future instead of being idle critics of the present. Although in an elementary stage, trade union work has also gained a good place in the list of priorities. "We want more workers" is a universal cry. It echoed from Upper

land to Lower Sind. Given the sustenance, intellectual and material, all-time workers can be drawn into this inner ring. Every effort will be made to provide the sap necessary for strengthening the tender shoots that have sprouted all over the Indus plain.

On the fourth anniversary of the '42 Ninth August it is good that thoughts of producing great husbandmen should occupy us. Intuitionally if not rationally, we know that the tasks always remain unfinished, when the task sheet lengthens out mysteriously, as every day dawns endlessly, timelessly. And since human good must come out of human effort, good herdsmen alone can be the pivot of such tasks. Lip homage to the sacrifice of our unknown fighters, ritualistic celebrations of "Days", leave me cold. Fortune has hitherto revolved on unseen wheels. Let us tear away the veil that obstructs our vision. Let us construct with the sweat of our labour wheels that we can see and feel—that will spare us the fate of a whimsical fortune. A solemn challenging call, this—the call that we must see into the future, build it ourselves. But the 9th of August was a solemn day—a day on which our Passion for Freedom burnt at its whitest, when instead of barren tears an ardent light streamed from dying eyes, and Honour found brave defenders fighting her battle.

Rabindranath has said "For our perfection we have to be vitally savage and mentally civilized; we should have the gift to be natural with nature and human with human society." For almost six weeks from the Ninth of August in the year '42 the Indian came nearest to this perfection.



and individual—engulfs one's inner self. The personal becomes so completely merged in a symbolic identity that the thought that the individual may irretrievably be lost begins to torment one. If the whole world gains and you lose, is it worth the loss? Vanity of vanities; the very notion that an individual "loses" and that there is in it "profit" for others is vain and shallow.

To stop drifting talk (as if talk is all that matters) let me submit a clarified account of a period of time that has been spent in the fellowship of workers and vast numbers of men and women. Many an innocent questioner asked if this was an election tour! "No. A selection tour to select the elect if you will". To assess the capacity of workers; the nature of work and the psychological temper of the people can best sum up the objects with which we venture outside our immediate orbit.

The journey began in the afternoon on August 18 from Delhi. The mail-van caught fire and delayed the train by three hours. An Anglo-Indian woman objected to a "Congress woman" objecting to her dog as a co-traveller—more delay. In the Nizam's territory at Dornakal, Khammameth and Madira, men and women asked for a message. The new reforms and the recent atrocity campaigns in certain villages have inflamed the State subjects. Bezawada and Tenali and onwards, one platform meeting after another followed. Everywhere the workers were reporting their '42 actions and asking for a scheme of work for the future. Andhradesa is the home of fiery people. The Communists are strongly organised there and busy sowing seeds of doubt in Congress *bona fides*. Nevertheless the people as elsewhere are not enamoured by their politics. But they have made deep inroads into the labour and kisan field.

A day in Madras town, the Students' Congress and the workers want to be addressed. A reading room in honour of Jaya Prakash Narayan has to be opened. The "medicos" want a "revolutionary" political talk. An exhibition of I.N.A. achievements must be visited and then the inevitable big meeting.

A travelling secretary's diary will tell its own tale. The Tilak (that) on the beach almost resembles the Chowpatty sands of Bombay. The Madras Indian is not the phlegmatic he is made out to be. His full-blooded response to '42 proves otherwise.

The rush begins. Villupuram, procession, meeting and then off to Chidambaram, with wayside meetings all the way. There is a

## 24. Twenty-one Days

If only time would stop, if only there were a breakdown in the time machine! It might then be possible to arrest the swift moving crowded scenes of my non-stop 21-day journey. The roar of the sea and the roar of human voices, how similar! Particularly when the latter come muffled and smothered in the fold of time and space. Every passing moment blots out from memory incidents and events that filled the day daily. Cities and towns and wayside villages so active with movement, sound and colour relapse into names on maps. Hills and rivers, green woods, patches of ocean and seas glimpsed from running vehicles become once again the Ghats, Cauvery, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Green woods, rice fields, lawns sun-gold ridges and blue mountains, valleys opening like amphitheatres, streams with ferry boats, river banks heaving with bamboo foliage—Kerala, Malabar to those distantly situated! Old towns walled and turretted by temple *gopurams*, tanks filled with sacred waters, fields and homesteads full of men, women and children and cattle, skies dotted with birds in the day and stars in the night—scenes the eye beheld in between the halts. Each halt had its own individuality while it lasted. Its own programme its local colour—but now with the passage of time one place might be another, every mass gathering like the one that preceded or followed it, one workers' assembly as much like the one that went before or after it! Imaginative integrity and artistic fancy demand a separate recording, a journey that was not meant to be empty of purpose.

Indulging in mere reveries will not do either. A political or organisational survey tour puts the individual entirely at the disposal of others. A never-ending series of human contacts—made



little trouble between the Students and the Town Congress Committees. The programme nicely adjusted to an accuracy of minutes goes wrong by half an hour. The students of Annamalai University at Chidambaram insisted in spite of official frowns on a meeting. Vociferous shouts of Long Live Revolution, brave ideas of willingness to do and die again. Railway workers are agitated at strike prospect. French-owned Karaikal, intensely anti-Imperialist. One of the most elaborately arranged meetings. When the hour of reckoning comes will we ever be able to make good the loss the people suffered in fighting the White oppressors?

On the run again to Tanjore. Once an emperor reigned here. But people do not remember that now. At Kumbakonam—the seat of South Indian intellectual orthodoxy, fifteen thousand people were jammed into a little park. Here in '42 shooting took place. Nine died including a little boy of ten. Did he know why he died? Will his unlined life increase the value of those who live after him?

In Tanjore the peasantry is in a state of ferment. Anti-Congress agents are busy. Zamindars of Tanjore feel they cannot fight both the Congress and the Communists. They are lining up with the former! In the silent manuscript world of the Tanjore library, the past lay docketed and neatly bundled. Tanjore District was one vast sea of turbulent ovation to '42, each garland a piece of exquisite floral artistry. Sandalwood, incense and fruit offering. The Hindu mind turns to temple ritual as naturally as the sunflower turns to the rising sun.

Between Tanjore and Erode was another rush. Meetings at Tiruvayur, Tirukkallimpalli; where the controllers of the crowd lost control and the meeting almost a mob of 20,000. Over the great anicut to Trichinopoly where the students and striking railway workers had to be addressed. The workers seemed confused and tense. The strike was a Communist challenge and nothing more. A public meeting. Twenty-five thousand people sat quietly and listened. Someone threw two stones. There was the beginning of a panic but it quietened down. It was a job getting out the meeting at the end. The new men of August met and discussed and worked out a plan for future action at Erode. Strong men from nearly all the districts. Fully confident that the Congress Socialist leadership will supply their demands. Over the Mettur dam that tames the Cauvery and converts it into a veritable life-giving

stream. Good work. Hill and river surround a valley rich in minerals. Workers actively engaged in union work. Bhavani riverside gathering of simpler folk keenly '42 conscious.

Through Mettur and Dharmapuri to Salem. The straight and narrow path of the programme had to be abandoned for a seven mile detour through Vellai, a little village, where 200 handlooms work and five thousand people of whom 500 are Congress members live. Between the village and Salem is Omalur where a Dane who had turned Indian lives. He has joined the Congress and is said to be very well regarded by the villagers.

In Salem, Rajaji's area, activity amongst Congressmen is still of the routine hackneyed character. The Netaji Youth League movement is stronger here than the Congress or R.S.D. movement. In the course of speeches made intelligible through a matchless interpreter I get attacks of absent-mindedness.

Off through Tiruppur to Coimbatore. Tiruppur is the Khadi capital of Tamilnad. Textile Mazdoors presented a guard of honour. Fifteen thousand came to the meeting. Between Tiruppur and Coimbatore there were meetings at Palladam and Suler. In '42 the people of Suler set fire to an aeroplane in a nearby aerodrome. Many were sentenced to life imprisonment, but were released when the Congress became Government. At Thondamuthur there was a peasants' conference. They came with their womenfolk. Later, the biggest meeting of the whole tour assembled here. A lakh of people. They sat as if they were a military formation, so silently and with such dignity.

Tiruppur and Coimbatore were landmarks. Mass and organisational strength, intense. Women and men workers and peasants, old and young aflame with the 'eternal fire that never dies'. Union work almost flawless. Coimbatore. A night sky studied with stars—strong breeze from the west. Working men and women in the entire district devoted to Congress.

From Coimbatore through Mettupalayam, Pollachi to Udumalpet. A meeting in the bed of a huge tank that is dry. Rapt crowds listening to word images in Hindi translated into Tamil, a language fit for oratory. The Tamilian's response to eloquence very sensitive. Young men eager and anxious to begin work. When will controversies cease to hold the attention of workers and organised work grip our minds? How will we face the enormous



tasks of guiding men whose faith and trust in the '42 resisters is almost blind.

Between Udumalpet and Palni an accident to the second car of the party. Tiruvengadam of Coimbatore and Sundarammal were in it. He suffered from shock. She got a cut ear. The front wheel fell off and the car overturned. The Dharmapuram hospital absorbed them. Palni is a place of pilgrimage. Elephants headed the procession with the National Flag held high in their trunks.

Through Dindigul where 5,000 people had patiently waited for two hours to Madura. In Madura 45,000 people sat and listened. There was tension. The railway strike was on. After the meeting it was difficult to get into the car. From Madura of the Meenakshi Temple through Sivaganga, Devacottah and Karaikudi (where 20,000 people came to the meeting) to Puducottah. This State of the south is ripe for a struggle. Its State Congress is looked upon as a moderate body. Its young men and labour workers are intensely active. The Labour Volunteer Corps is almost in military trim. Madura District is a potential Satara area. Puducottah very acutely anti-British and anti-personal value. Devacottah, scene of much repression. Almost on Ballia scale. From Puducottah southwards to the Cape.

In the silent hours of the night long past the time of retirement for rest, men and women await one's arrival. The look of mute appeal or glowing resolve in the eyes that gaze out of the assembled heads. Long forgotten faces from other such gatherings come and join them. Then time and space play tricks that almost challenge one's sanity. As the sun rose out of the sea washing the shores of Kanya Kumari, there was a new feeling in the air, a new tone in the voices around and the clouds poured their rainbow content into the waters of three oceans. The Maiden Goddess guarding this southern most outpost, so legend has it, awaits the arrival of her groom. The religious of mind might liken her vigil to India's impatient waiting. From the Cape to Trivandrum, capital of Travancore. The University Union had to be inaugurated. Five thousand, of whom 500 were women were present. A visit to the Labour Union office with a girl volunteers' guard of honour. A huge meeting. The Malayali patriotism takes a concrete form. Language a big difficulty. Hindi-Malayalam interpreter a crying need. Through Quilon and Kottayam to Ernakulam, capital of

Cochin with about half a dozen crowded meetings in between. Ernakulam a town seething with Congress enthusiasm. Less restrained in atmosphere than Travancore. Through Alwaye and Trichur where the S.I. Rly. workers again had to be addressed to Palghat. More meetings on the way. Palghat meeting, one of the most responsive. Speeches in English have such an outlandish effect that it is almost nauseating to continue in it. A night's halt and again on the march. Feroke had a huge meeting. Feroke is famous for its Feroke Bridge Sabotage of 1942. Calicut. Another huge meeting and a talk to workers and students. Then through Elathur (the landing place of Vasco-da-Gama) and Quilandi, Madagara, each of which had a meeting to Mabe, the French "possession" where a thousand had collected, to Tellicherry and Cannore which is reputed to be the Communist stronghold. Then the return journey to Madras.

Travelling in buses and cars over hills and across valleys. Nearly two thousand miles of travelling, what have they brought in their wake? A stock of fresh experiences images in serried ranks all closing in one upon another, a close range view of men and women talking Tamil and Malayalam, an impression of intensified hatred of the British and capitalist systems of overlordship. It echoed throughout the journey. Mountain ranges and rivers and provincial disputes are prevalent. But there are really just two nations—of the Have Nots and the Have Gots. And in the twilight hour I hear again the sound of conches, the warvail of bagpipe music heard in Ramnad. I can see at night the huddled bedraggled silhouettes of human beings on the verge of hunger death, eyes afire with the will to continue the fight for freedom, words reflecting shadowy sentiments.

Whether organisational activity will increase in the South after this visit or not I cannot say. I can only repeat that the people are prepared for it. If not we, others will handle them. It may not be a healthy lead. But a vacuum cannot remain unfilled.



testimony of this fact. Her peoples' trials go on unendingly. Turn to whatever direction one might, the people are at the mercy of the disruptionist whose motives are always anti-social, anti-progress and anti-freedom. Big nations *versus* the small, the big man against the small, are locked in open fight here, an indirect clash there. The issues they seek to decide as yet scarcely reflect except in a far-fetched sense, the issues of good and evil for the daily worker. They fall—and how they fall!—prey to war cries that others raise in their name and for their sake.

Since August 16th of this year men in the big cities of Calcutta and Bombay and some smaller towns have been gripped by hatred; ferocity arising out of the hate impulse has blinded them completely. Men and women and children, no more concerned with man-made politics than the stars in the heavens are bothered about them, suffered death, inhuman indignities and bestial cruelty. This frenzy-killing reflects such grossness and such coarsening of the stuff of human material, that the mind refuses to recognise in it the "divine spark". The mind refuses again to admit that the beast in man lurks so near the surface; it begins to be engulfed under huge waves of scepticism. "Is this all?" is a question that troubles the baffled minds. "If so, why talk of a golden age to come when peace and goodwill and the reign of justice to all will govern men's lives"—vexed and perplexed the mind threatens to take refuge in withdrawal from the sphere of action. Creating conditions for the advent of such an age seems a hopeless task. And, not reason, but an ingrained belief lurking behind this sceptical outlook comes to the fore, clings to the thought that perhaps there is something "beyond the dust", some grain of gold that awaits its liberation from the mire and filth around it. Shall we end our pursuit to find the gold, shall we disband the *rescue squads* because we have failed thus far in discovering anything of value? Baffled, unable to stop in spite of all our well meaning resolves, the action of groups egged on by brute passions, the sense of one's inefficacy grows with rapidity. It seems as if only the natural law of declining velocity can check this mass madness.

A correct picture of the genesis of the clash and its development is yet to come. But this much is clear that the organisation that called out men to anti-Congress acts has disowned responsibility. The evidence available suggests that though sporadic, there

## 25. Group Insanity

A MORBID condition of the mind due to diseased action of the nervous system is called insanity. This calamity overtakes the group as much as the individual mind. In troubled times after periods of war and insurrection, the human order goes through the throes of suffering, physical and mental. The order tolerates the strain, the nerve racking agony, in the belief that these are temporary evils. But when evil borne patiently results not in good but in the emergence of new forms of wrong, sanity gives place to insanity. Frustration, denial, and the realisation that it fought in vain, that at any rate the weak man's sun of sorrow must rise again and again in obedience to a law which he can no more alter than he can the system that controls the coming of night and dawning of day, is fatal to his peace of mind. Men aspiring for power and men seeking wealth use his inner disharmony to serve their purposes. To disturb his calm they fling a stone or a shoe into his world. Immediately the conflagration begins. Their power-plans spring into action, whether it is a riot they need, or a strike they risk, it is the wily man's game. Distracted, long-suffering exploited men, women and children of the soil not knowing whose game they are playing, imagine it is their own. They die in fratricidal brother-killing-brother orgies, convinced in their enraging state that their own kith and kin have turned enemy. Thus revolution is turned into counter-revolution because post revolutionary strifes are exploited by foes of revolutionary changes. History has recorded this alternation of mass struggles with inter-group conflicts in nearly every age. Where power and wealth values have been substituted for the value attached to life, truth and goodness there has been much misery for the bulk of the people. China today is a tragic



is a loose conspiracy to kill on a community basis. Hindus here, Muslims there, gruesome stories of mutual reprisal fill the mind and heart with disgust. Rooted in instinct rather than reason, the thought that innocent people are dying because another set of innocent beings are dead elsewhere sickens the heart and numbs the mind.

What can one do to reduce this antagonism between brother and brother. Convinced that divisions based on religions and caste are artificial and cannot be maintained under the impact of modern social, economic and ethical concepts, goodwill, mutual confidence and a new understanding must be established immediately. Or the venom will spread and destroy the inner tissues of our corporate life. Also conditions may arise wherein a fascist form of rule will be looked upon as the inevitable need of the hour. This latter is a contingency that socialists and democrats must take count of. And if they are in earnest about their socialism and democracy they must adjust their subtle ideological differences to face a common danger as a united body.

The average Indian, Hindu or Muslim, knows full well the futility of killing. He knows it takes them nowhere. In private conversations during moments when they can review matters calmly they talk as sane men should. If only we can prove to them that their economic interests act as grouping agents also, that the brotherhood of the underclothed binds them as closely as a commonly held view of religion and metaphysics they will relearn forgotten truths. To disinfect minds festering with ill will we shall have to divert their thought processes along projects that bear relation to their daily lives. Converting the STATE to reflect their good rather than interests that gain dividends out of their poverty is one such project. It can absorb their action impulses and soothe their survival fears. Stern measures against the anti-social man is a function of the state. Since the Indian state is strewn with poison seeds of disruption, suspicion, mutual hostility, its tasks can be completely successful only when there is a planned drive to unearth and destroy them. Foreign rulers of India banked on the maturing into full vigour of the Tree of Discord. They see that it has borne fruit. To stop its being eaten by unsuspecting Adams it has to be cut down at once. Its roots must be scotched and its leafy branches lopped off. Under its dark shade today the state is

experimenting with a form of "self-government". We who are not directly participating in this interesting venture must stop watching it and it alone. We can avoid indulging in this pastime by remaining strictly outside its orbit. We must create a new machine of strong men and women whose first qualification must be fearlessness. Braving the worst, we must plunge into the problem of periodic group insanity and its many manifestations. Let us not be content with repeating platitudes and over-simplified formulas. Hindu-Muslim unity has been on the Congress constructive programme for years and yet it has never considered a concrete plan to make it effective. In recent years there has been after every conflict with British power, a lapse into mutual strife. And yet there is up till this day no scheme to combat this well-known enemy's attempt to crush the rising tide of national strength. Frankly, the fault lies within. We do not feel in our blood strongly enough about what we think with our minds. Our instincts in this matter are still not freed of pulls that narrow their range of sympathy. In the matter of *caste* as well as *class* and of course *religious* differences we have not been able to rise above the compulsions of either. If freedom from fear is the first requisite of the crusaders, in this battle against group insanity, freedom from prejudice is the second condition for his eligibility. Harijan or Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, these are labels that denote attributes that are of secondary importance. What concerns the humanist is whether or not a man enjoys the privileges he is entitled to because of his status as a member of the human order of beings.

I have talked in this vein not because this is topical subject. On the contrary I found an inner resistance operating against a frank survey of this check to national growth. A malignant feature of all such intricate situations is to encourage evasions because solutions are not easy to discover. Powerlessness to grapple with a problem very often encourages one to take shelter in arguments that prove that the problem does not exist. This in its turn makes for converting the malady into a chronic state. Curing ailments when in an acute state are the safest, however drastic the cure. Much of our mettle as social physicians will be tested in the years to come. The problem of dissolving conflicts that are clannish and tribal in their motivation, though difficult, has a solution. If we had our way what would we do is a question that faces one everywhere. Since we cannot have our way, what can we do is more real-



istic one. But we may not evade the first or we dare not avoid the second. I can only once again remind workers everywhere to apply their minds to solving such riddles by building a chain. But before a chain can be made, we need links. And for perfecting a link we need a workshop for making men and women to function as effective links. This can be set up provided the initiating will is strong. Otherwise *Homo Sapiens* will remain as clumsy as he is. He will suffer and die, warring against himself all the time.

## 26. The Ganges in Mourning

The noise and fever of existence is never the same from year to year. Patriotism unites a whole people. Its blaze draws within its fold of light the entire mass. Parochial and tribal passion also resembles it and imparts to the group the same intensity and cohesiveness. But in the one case the war is against a common enemy. In the second case the war is a family war. Incalculable and unanalysable forces work during an internal strife and cruelty issues from screech to screech. Whether the enemy is real or imaginary it hardly matters. In moments of frenzy, the eye is blinded, reason quite blunted and that most hateful of all passions, fear holds supreme command. If one could only banish fear, purge the early obsessed mind of all its concomitants and instil instead fearlessness, national and group hysteria would cease to convulse man. If a formula to exercise the animal fears that haunt individuals as individuals or collectively as masses could be found, these periodic strifes would not injure mankind as wantonly as they do today. How to embolden the spirit of man? Give him confidence that in born of strength and he ceases to be a coward. To create in man the assurance that he will be his own enemy if he is *afraid*, requires a revolution in psychology, environment and above all a sublimation of the *life-instinct*. The will to live is healthy; biologically it is the only urge that is important for race continuity. All the other instincts stem from it and spring out of its main steam. To seek to destroy it is to suggest race suicide. But when craven fear grips man and reduces him to something abject because he is *afraid to die*, race-interest demands that a sublimation, an alteration in the quality of the urge to hold life dear, takes place. On the underland of this love of life there must be many another urge



supporting it, almost acting as scaffolding for the safety of the main drive. If fear of death could prevent death its purpose might have had a healthy aspect. Actually it encourages mortality and the evils to which man is heir ever since he gave up living in the wilds. Wilderness-living is no solution, quite true. But the chaos and immorality implied in a warring, wrangling and mutually destructive society is hardly civilization.

Lessons learnt in the school of life are not easily forgotten. They teach one volumes even if they leave one shell-shocked and stupefied at times. One must explore before one can analyse. One must analyse for coming to conclusions. There is wear and tear involved in this journeying for knowledge and experience. The world and the antics of its living creatures and man more than others are undoubtedly exciting experiences. But when men and women complain incessantly of crimes committed against them, of pain and death and evil that harasses the body and soul, the mind grows sick. Self-imposed burdens sit lightly as a rule, but in moments which confront the mind with pictures of suffering and sorrow, the load weighs heavily. The spirit to be strong must be serene. And serenity is the first casualty when you sit watching the talk of fear-gripped man's cruelties, his acts of cowardice, lust and avarice. Resentment at our inability to control and guide human passions, unable to alter the facts of race and social heritage, faced with problems beyond solution unless possessed with limitless power, one's will to serve wilts. And helplessness and a sense of defeat cast their shadow around one. But can we live under a shadow for long?

Calcutta is under a shadow that is long and depressing. For almost eight weeks its people have lived in fear. What they have seen and heard has affected them deeply. It is not all for the worse. Much wisdom has come to many whose outlooks have been changed as a result of the actualities they have witnessed. Indulgences in generalisations about superior and inferior culture is impossible for one who has known men of learning and breeding behave as the unlettered, prejudice ridden fanatic or gangster behave. Mob fury again is known to be uncontrollable. Stories are common of furious mobs suddenly calming at sight of extreme helplessness. Marooned in a hostile locality, families have been rescued at great personal risk by men belonging to the hostile

community. Hindus and Muslims have helped each other because for generations they had lived as good neighbours and friends. When aggression pacts were entered upon and evacuations took place under such pacts. Whenever groups defended themselves by upholding their locality and the so much described pitched battles were fought, casualties were few. Group resistance, it was found, was most effective because it meant organised defence and therefore matched the aggressor's preparations for attack. Wherever this was possible, gruesome forms of revenge were not perpetrated. Wherever the victims were isolated and defenceless they suffered death and much worse than death. Stories of heroism though few and far between as compared to tales of sordid crime and beast-like behaviour, are rich with significance. That despite the prevalent provocations there were individuals in both the affected communities whose sense of honour and humanity did not desert them is heartening news. Class solidarity played its own part insofar as the middle classes were concerned. But lower down the scale this was not so. Strangely enough common sufferings born of a common economic condition did not make the common men of either faith brothers in facing a situation dangerous to both. They fell a prey to the incitements of those imported from elsewhere. They killed each other instead of saving one another.

Religious wars in history are full of instances of acts committed in blind anger. And such wars, we must know, have raged in Europe more than elsewhere. The Catholics and Protestants of England and Europe generally fought each other savagely. Power politics have exploited religions throughout history. This phase of religious bigotry in our country is in its last stages. Before extinction the flame always burns at its brightest.

It is inconceivable that the common Indian will not see through quite soon, the cunning of which he is the victim. Out of this deluge of human suffering a new awareness is registering itself—the awareness that to the Muslim wage earner Pakistan today means no means of earning a living and to the Hindu employer boycotts the Mussalman means paying higher wages to labour and is therefore no sound economics even if it is good retaliation.

Furies roused by the politician-demagogues of the Muslim League's hatred-dispensation in Bengal initiated this communal war. Had the Government not been a party, the course of action



followed by the inflammatory anti-social gangster stuff in Calcutta could have been checked. Counter action, began in a spirit of self-protection rather than aggression, became violent and brutal and in some instances extremely savage.

This and much more will be revealed. But a post-mortem analysis will scarcely justify the sacrifice of men and women who have paid with their lives. It must pay a dividend. It must lead out of this gruesome phase in our social relationships. Congressmen have been accused of inaction on the one hand and of active sympathising with the counter-killing on the other. When faced with a situation such as prevails in a religious war those whose nationalism is synonymous with religion are placed on the horns of a dilemma. If they are anywhere in the field they are accused of participation. If they withdraw into their shells waiting for the storm to subside their integrity is questioned. Their private sanity plied against public madness is tested severely. Congressmen fail to appear on the scene not because they lack courage. Their hesitations to such occasion not because they lack courage. Their hesitations to appear on the scene is not because their values have been distorted. I am of the opinion that our greatest handicap is the inequacies of organisation. Faced with a crisis when the State is content to be a nuisance, the Congress machinery falls. Helplessness and inability to function during such conflicts and Congressmen ineffective, good targets for its well-wishers and enemies. Therefore, it is time that we looked at ourselves from an inner platform of ourselves" and small as we are, we feel personally obliged to make the Congress strong, conscious of its sovereign power because it has the moral support of men and women alone can confer sovereignty.

Analysing, testing and experimenting are the scientist's method of arriving at conclusions. This must be our method also. If enlarged responsibilities are to be discharged with efficiency to some purpose. All the grace goes out of our persuasive eloquence when we are unable to follow up our advice with material results. Protect the weak, organise for self-defence, mobilise against social attacks on the defenceless, respect, irrespective of creed, the sanctity of the non-aggressive individual. These platitudes if we cannot provide organisational means or effecting good advice. A disciplined volunteer organisation training to observe a code of ethics based on equalitarian principles drilled into physical fitness and physical fearlessness would

the demands of today. The Congress is expected to fulfil functions that are state functions. Its machine must either be strong enough to break the old State or must assume parallel responsibility. Information, Courier and Ambulance services must form auxiliaries of the volunteer service if during emergencies it is to act as the people's supreme organisation.

On the way to Calcutta I witnessed an experiment on the above lines. Curfew and other restrictions on citizens' liberties in Allahabad had been imposed to check anti-social elements from destroying the peaceful way of life. In broad daylight the city's streets were deserted because the 20-hour ban on movements was relaxed late in the afternoon and early in mornings. I was reminded of descriptions of a besieged city. Here and there military vehicles swooped around posting pickets on point duty. It was said to contemplate that such should be the first fruits of the power transference process. Nevertheless there was at least in this very city an experiment in progress on the success of which would depend real freedom. The Students' Congress Officers Training Camp with 55 trainees from districts in United Provinces was an oasis in this silent deserted tense city beside the Jamuna. Practical military training, its science and arts imparting political information were subjects with which the 15-day course was planned. Alert and brisk, the officers to be were being remoulded.

As the sun went down in the west the young men took by turns their certificates and in their eyes I found a look that was unseen. They looked beyond you, uncommunicative, almost forbidding. This neutral gaze had behind it firmness and the determination not to surrender to weakness. "Not to be taken unawares" is one of the motives behind this type of training. If every young man who seeks to serve causes other than his own receives training with this objective heavily underlined, may be our adventures in search of Utopia will end not in bloodshed but a reign where that will be outlawed.



sign and alien in spirit, is numerically inferior and qualitative of a different calibre to those it has overpowered. The British have flourished in India and elsewhere by making a fine art of this special branch of the science of ruling men in foreign lands. They borrowed years ago the value of making a systematic inroad into the unifying forces in India's social fabric. A series of cunning devices were initiated. The deadliest of these was encouraging religious bigotry. Having realised that the Indian mind was sensitive to religion it took advantage of the existence of different faiths in our country. It exploited the readily inflammable stuff that makes the orthodox a bigot and set about lighting fires with it wherever necessary. Contrasted with Akbar's endeavours to overcome the religious bar between ruler and ruled the British rulers' efforts strike one as barbarous and devilish. The one brought together Muslims, Christians, Buddhist divines, so that a universal religion could be founded. Every student of Indian history knows this. What he does not know perhaps is that under Muslim rule forcible conversion was considered a crime. No less an authority than Maulana Abul Kalam Azad believes this. As he points out, had Moghuls or their forerunners embarked on a campaign to convert the masses to Islam at the point of the sword, in the United Provinces of Rohilkhand and Oudh and the area around Delhi, men of the Muslim faith would have been in an overwhelming majority. Occasions in our pre-British history when religion became the playing of politics and flared up are rare. Since the advent of the British they are frequent. British rulers took with them the Christian missionary wherever they wanted to plant their domination. They did so in India. Consequently the Christian religion with possibilities of political advantages attached to its followers, became a menace. Efforts were made to prevent the faithful from breaking away either from Islam or Hinduism. This in its turn became material for helping the British policy of encouraging religious divisions. Fanaticism was deliberately though cleverly encouraged. The majority were made to believe that they had a right to rule ruthlessly and the minority told to expect nothing but insecurity and exploitation from a majority.

Camouflaged as a communal war a civil war is being precipitated. Lest it should be too late, even in a matter of months, British agents in India were called upon to release immediately forces that would stop the liquidation of British power. From

## 27. Death Festival

THE last fortnight has been made up of days of anguish, suspense and helplessness for the people of Noakhali District. In every corner of the country men and women are aghast at the capacity of the unscrupulous to hate innocent folk. Men and women quite ignorant are asking why the merciless should suddenly descend upon them demanding submission of body and soul. Compassionlessness had reached a point that defies understanding. A general state of stupefaction prevails and normal life is suspended in East Bengal. The reckless elements in that part of the province have gained the upper hand. To curb men whose purposes are criminal and methods ruthless, organised force—violent or non-violent—is necessary. The State should be the repository of such sanctioned force meant to protect and defend the average citizen. The problem for the terrorized sections in East Bengal is this: who will protect the helpless when the State is hostile to their aspirations? Who will save them when the State's resources are utilised against their well being? Openly and through agents provocateurs they feel the State is assaulting and terrorizing them.

In the Indian scene the British have flourished largely because they found willing instruments to act for them. When rebel Muslims had to be crushed Hindus were cajoled into helping them. When Hindu India became the spearhead of mass rebellion Muslims were brought into action. The agent is either a dupe or a calculating miscreant. The machinery that regulates his activities is elaborate and cleverly constructed. It oils its engines with diverse lubricants. Greed, bigotry, brute instincts, nothing is too evil for it, particularly when the power it subserves, apart from being for-



Waziristan to the easternmost shores of the Bay of Bengal there is enough evidence that the masterly policy of giving up power and straining with every means to retain it, is working. Newspaper statistics of dead men and women may or may not be accurate, but the fact that the Hindu minority of Eastern Bengal are being terrorized by an inhuman group of gangsters hired for this specific purpose is established beyond doubt. Two hundred and perhaps more villages have been besieged in the districts of Noakhali and Tippera. In Ranigunj, Lakshminipur, Begumgunj and Sonbad thanas, in the former and the Chandpur and Faridganj thanas, in the latter a terrified minority is living in constant danger. Always in an area where communication between district towns and villages are not easy owing to flooded fields and rivulets roads have been broken and the small railway stations burnt by armed leaders of this campaign of terror. Indifferent for two months to warnings of their preparations, the Government of Bengal helped the organisers to perfect their plans.

The immediate object of these organised attacks is to enforce Pakistan in India. Its other incentive is to rain revenge on the Hindus of Noakhali for the death of Muslims in Calcutta. Utilising an ignorant and fanatical section of the peasantry to act as his crusaders a notorious leader of dacoits is trying to work out a private programme of political revenge. This led to his not receiving a Muslim League ticket in the last elections. Lest his unlawful manner of earning a living be exposed and incidentally to wreak vengeance on the present Ministry of Bengal this man declared war on the peace-loving docile men and women of East Bengal. In the name of Pakistan he is actually having his own back on the Direct Actionists for Pakistan. Working for the downfall of the present Ministry is among his first objectives—so that he may be revenged. Also he told his 'followers' to take the law into their own hands because after all, it was League Raj. This sounds complicated, but we would do well to trace these wheels within wheels. The Government of Bengal is now becoming aware of these facts. Hence the recent note of firmness in its pronouncement.

All efforts to create eleventh-hour resistance groups by the threatened failed because their opponents had cut off all means of rushing help. Wherever the brave died resisting, the moral effect

should have affected the heart of the aggressor. But it was where the brave resisted and held out, that they were overawed. The state's apathy on the one hand and the people's unpreparedness on the other have caused death on a big scale and panic on a bigger scale. Relief and rescue work is engaging minds of the elderly. There is on the other hand a strong move to launch a movement against the Government and have it replaced. Men and women of Bengal whose political consciousness is keen are moved to the depths of their being. The cradle of revolution in India will be turned into a graveyard, they say. Drives for forming volunteer and guerilla squads are being made. The lessons that Noakhali teaches are many. Unless the Congress can take to the masses its programme of a social revolution they will be puppets in nefarious hands. Unless plans of the socialist state for which social revolutionaries are working are unfolded the misled Mussalman peasant and worker will go on taking one suicidal step after another. They have to be saved from the ugly politics of a party that has neither a human outlook nor a social programme of mass well-being. And finally we must not let momentary hysteria cloud our vision. A compromise with first principles means the betrayal of the future. Our ancestors made many such compromises. We are paying the wages of their sin. And their sin was fear. Hence for a thousand years or so foreigners came and overpowered them. A fatal lack of union was their primary weakness. It is ours also. Not a unity of religious faith so much as a unity of the humanist and the equalitarian must spring into being. "The world is a bridge; pass over it, but build no house thereon". But what if the bridge goes down?



---

---

**PART III**

**TOPICS INDIAN AND  
INTERNATIONAL**

---

---



## A. BUILDING THE NATION

### 1. Imperatives of Left Unity

---

INDIA is entering the thirteenth year of her life as an independent nation-state on a note of dismal discord. The sound and fury of politics as practised in multi-party democracies does not worry the average citizen normally. The routine of protest and counter-protest as between political groups and parties or against the administration authority is to be expected and even welcomed, particularly in a country that has yet to grow out of its political adolescence. But the tendency to achieve power at any cost and to fight elections without regard to any ethical canons is a matter of serious concern. Even these superficial shortcomings, however, can be controlled sooner or later.

What is causing real anxiety to many thoughtful people in the main, is the weakening of the national will to unity and desire for collective strength. This indifference to the welding of the nation is making our very young Republic increasingly vulnerable. Those who feel intensely perturbed by this unhappy development have reasons for doing so. The long and dark night of India's total subjugation can rationally be expected to breed in us acute consciousness of the tragic historical consequences of disunity in her bitter years of servitude and humiliation.

What makes the beginning of our thirteenth year of independence ominous is the increasing strength of caste and communal organisations and the passions they have unleashed. These developments are reminiscent of the days when imperialism was triumphant. With the defeat of the forces of imperialism one should have expected a decline if not complete elimination of remnants of crude feudal thought and obsolete social habits. A generation that actively carried on the fight against these evils, making it a vital



part of the national struggle, is being called upon to witness the evolution of a new irrational challenge to democratic and egalitarian principles and social decencies.

When assessing similar situations before independence, it often struck me that sowing dissensions and keeping the community divided was an important instrument of alien state policy and those who fought imperialism assumed that communalism as a reactionary force could be destroyed really only in freedom. When foreign domination ended twelve years ago, it was therefore taken for granted that as soon as state power was vested in the democratic national leadership that overthrew it, the roots of social disintegration would wither. That assumption has been proved wrong. These shameful vestiges have not been cauterised. This is painfully borne out by the communal ideologies that are permitted to permeate our political platforms and to use the instruments of our secular democracy like adult suffrage to subvert it! Obviously then, British power when it withdrew in 1947 had succeeded not only in dividing the country but in leaving intact the seeds of future discord also. The leniency shown to communal fanatics in the first year of freedom cost us the life of one who was the nation's most precious asset. After that experience it should have become impossible for the communalist to foul politics. But more than a decade later we find slogans devoid of any economic and social content being permitted to mislead the voter when he sets out to take political decisions in our parliamentary democracy.

There are two other factors that have contributed considerably to a weakening of our new nation-state: The issue of language and linguistic states and a sharpening of local patriotism and consequential disputes about state borders.

These dreadful debates have cost the nation a great deal in terms of human energy and emotion. But since the language controversy cuts across caste and communal barriers, it is less dangerous and its solution may be only a matter of time. Already the controversy has narrowed down and if a truly democratic decision is once taken with firmness it can heal the wounds the protagonists inflicted on one another.

Parochially inclined groups can and do injure the cause of unity by disputes about small territory. But usually they are not tainted with the kind of narrow and sectarian thought that leads to the

regeneration of vast communities in compartments.

Casteism, linguism and parochialism are today the three main causes of our disunity but of these the one that does maximum injury to the spirit of democratic unity is the casteist view of society.

The fact that we have as yet not achieved a unified understanding of certain basic principles of nationhood and social justice cannot be ignored any longer. The prevalent national mood is so powerfully vitiated by currents of narrow sectarianism that if unchecked they are likely to do irreparable damage to the sense of national oneness that held us together during half a century of struggle. If this is not realised in time the political and material gains of the decade can be seriously jeopardised.

Interneecine resentments and tension, at almost every level, have reached such a point that forces opposed to socialism, secularism and parliamentary democracy find it the easiest thing to exploit the situation to their advantage. As a matter of fact, the reactionary Right has already realised this and feels that the opportune moment for it to strike has at last arrived. The recent emergence of a new political consolidation—the Swatantra Party—is the overt expression of this realisation. In a less spectacular and more piecemeal manner exclusively communal forces also are gaining ground. Wherever disillusionment born of discontent and disappointment with the performance of those in authority rise to the surface, we find reactionary elements rearing their heads and misleading the unwary.

In this situation can what is called the Left afford to allow minds in despair to gather round reaction or drift into passive defeatism?

The history of the rise of Fascism in the West is not so remote. What it wrote on the wall is not yet quite faint.

The Left in India, to people of my way of thinking, is contained today within the two major political parties—in the Congress and the Communist Party of India. The rest are splinters consisting either of well-meaning individualists or confused good samaritans whose chief function is to sow confusion and help the very forces they want to defeat.

Neither of the two major parties, however, is likely to agree with this analysis. In fact both will emphatically disagree with it.



part of the national struggle, is being called upon to witness the evolution of a new irrational challenge to democratic and egalitarian principles and social decencies.

When assessing similar situations before independence, it often struck me that sowing dissensions and keeping the community divided was an important instrument of alien state policy and those who fought imperialism assumed that communalism as a reactionary force could be destroyed really only in freedom. When foreign domination ended twelve years ago, it was therefore taken for granted that as soon as state power was vested in the democratic national leadership that overthrew it, the roots of social discrimination would wither. That assumption has been proved wrong. These shameful vestiges have not been cauterised. This is painfully borne out by the communal ideologies that are permitted to permeate our political platforms and to use the instruments of our secular democracy like adult suffrage to subvert it! Obviously then, British power when it withdrew in 1947 had succeeded not only in dividing the country but in leaving intact the seeds of future discord also. The leniency shown to communal fanatics in the first year of freedom cost us the life of one who was the nation's most precious asset. After that experience it should have become impossible for the communalist to foul politics. But more than a decade later we find slogans devoid of any economic and social content being permitted to mislead the voter when he sets out to take political decisions in our parliamentary democracy.

There are two other factors that have contributed considerably to a weakening of our new nation-state: The issue of language and linguistic states and a sharpening of local patriotism and consequential disputes about state borders.

These dreadful debates have cost the nation a great deal in terms of human energy and emotion. But since the language controversy cuts across caste and communal barriers, it is less dangerous and its solution may be only a matter of time. Already the controversy has narrowed down and if a truly democratic decision is once taken with firmness it can heal the wounds the protagonists inflicted on one another.

Parochially inclined groups can and do injure the cause of unity by disputes about small territory. But usually they are not tainted with the kind of narrow and sectarian thought that leads to the

regeneration of vast communities in compartments.

Casteism, linguism and parochialism are today the three main features of our disunity but of these the one that does maximum injury to the spirit of democratic unity is the casteist view of society.

The fact that we have as yet not achieved a unified understanding of certain basic principles of nationhood and social justice cannot be ignored any longer. The prevalent national mood is so powerfully vitiated by currents of narrow sectarianism that if unchecked they are likely to do irreparable damage to the sense of national oneness that held us together during half a century of struggle. If this is not realised in time the political and material gains of the decade can be seriously jeopardised.

Interneine resentments and tension, at almost every level, have reached such a point that forces opposed to socialism, secularism and parliamentary democracy find it the easiest thing to exploit the situation to their advantage. As a matter of fact, the reactionary Right has already realised this and feels that the opportune moment for it to strike has at last arrived. The recent emergence of a new political consolidation—the Swatantra Party—is the overt expression of this realisation. In a less spectacular and more piecemeal manner exclusively communal forces also are gaining ground. Wherever disillusionment born of discontent and disappointment with the performance of those in authority rise to the surface, we find reactionary elements rearing their heads and misleading the unwary.

In this situation can what is called the Left afford to allow minds in despair to gather round reaction or drift into passive defeatism?

The history of the rise of Fascism in the West is not so remote. What it wrote on the wall is not yet quite faint.

The Left in India, to people of my way of thinking, is contained today within the two major political parties—in the Congress and the Communist Party of India. The rest are splinters consisting either of well-meaning individualists or confused good samaritans whose chief function is to sow confusion and help the very forces they want to defeat.

Neither of the two major parties, however, is likely to agree with this analysis. In fact both will emphatically disagree with it.



And yet, judged by the political pronouncements of the Congress and Communist parties, a detached observer cannot but come to the conclusion that they are broadly in sympathy with policies and programmes that in current political terminology belong to parties of the 'Left'. One has only to study the Nagpur resolutions of the Congress and the documents of the Ooty Seminar and recent policy statements and resolutions of the Communist Party to discern a common approach in crucial matters related to economic development and international relations and, above all, in the role of parliamentary democracy in establishing a socialist society. This similarity of outlook on basic national objectives does not rule out differences and dissimilarities in matters of detail, such as the order of priorities, the rate at which reforms should be implemented, the firmness required to check maladministration and corruption, etc. But, by and large, both these parties are agreed on the fundamental role of an industrialised and planned economy as the only rational and scientific road to national progress. Indian Communists have gone further than they ever dared to go before and have removed the last barrier and accepted the validity of the Nehru formulation that given universal adult suffrage and compulsory education, parliamentary democracy can replace a capitalist society with a socialist order of production and distribution. Similarly, in international affairs, these two parties have for many years now shared in an almost bi-partisan policy on major issues. With so much in common, it should not be difficult for the leaders of both the parties to see how interests both abhor are preparing to cut the ground from under democracy and socialism. Unless political power is seen as an end in itself it should not be difficult for them to realise that freedom as they understand it is in real peril.

The mistakes of the past and present will pale into insignificance if these two parties continue to believe that even now they are in totally irreconcilable ideological camps. By deliberately exciting caste passions, their real adversaries—the believers in an acquisitive order of society as against a socialist pattern of living—will hit out at both of them even as the imperialist with this very weapon was able to divide India in his day.

Will such an understanding lead to the weakening of one or the other of these parties? When nations are confronted with major threats like world wars or civil wars, like-minded parties usually

come together. With the restoration of normal conditions each component of the national coalition goes its way, content to place before the electorate at the proper time its own programme as opposed to the programme of the party in power. This has happened again and again in countries with political systems similar to ours and can and will happen here also. There is no question of liquidation of their identities or of mergers. It is merely a matter of defending the foundations of a commonly acceptable national edifice in periods of confusion or crisis.

I am of the view that we have entered a period of crisis with the emergence of the Swatantra Party. It has come earlier than anticipated and it is all the more significant that the challenge should come at a time when the Second Five Year Plan is far from fulfilment, the food situation has not improved and the army of the unemployed is claiming new recruits with every passing hour. If instead of recognising the dangers inherent in these developments, parties who ardently believe in the same things continue to weaken one another and thereby the progressive forces in India, they will merely hasten the beginning of the end of the dream of socialism.

The Congress as the senior party of the nation, a party that at one time contained within its fold nearly all the socialist parties and the Communist party as well, will naturally have to make up its mind without further loss of time and strength. It can once again unify the people around nationally accepted vision of the future. From the days when it nearly rejected socialism and ejected convinced socialists from its ranks, it has travelled far. From Avadi onwards it has again been approaching the goal of socialist understanding at an ever-increasing pace, Nagpur being the latest milestone.

It must seek allies if it is serious about implementing social reforms and going ahead with its plans for completing the remaining half of its economic plans. The Congress was never sectarian in the days when it led the fight for political freedom. It need not be so if it wishes to fight for newer freedoms. It never was in fear of rival ideologies because of the people's faith in its message.

Its allies should and can be from the Left, rather than the communal and feudal Right. Seeing in each other the main enemy of social freedom both the Congress and the Communists may find



that reaction has made the best of this situation and put out the light that neither cared to protect.

---

*Link*, August 16, 1959.

## 2. Memories of '42

---

MUCH water has rushed down the Ganges and the Yangtze, the Volga, the Nile and the Mississippi in the eighteen years since 1942, when our people threw their final challenge to British authority in India, and memories of that exciting period in world history are already becoming vague.

As the years roll by, men and events that make history and shake the earth from end to end, become shadows. Even the millennial tragedies of war lose their grim appeal. Upheavals and gigantic conflicts that once seemed inescapably decisive take their orderly place in what is but a process, and particular occasions like ours in 1942 begin to appear almost unreal in 1960.

There is nothing extraordinary or regrettable about this blurring of the distant scene. The past cannot and ought not to dominate the present. Great achievements, of intellect or physical heroism—or sordid deeds and happenings of the past can be given precise and specific significance only at the risk of rank exaggeration, however objective the writer of history be.

Even so, for a correct understanding of present social situations a study of particular periods of history, and the separate events that made the period, is useful. Any event or occasion wholly forgotten, can make action in the present irrelevant and occasionally make it even look like reaction. Lack of perspective often vests human activity with purely superficial ends and exclusive satisfaction of current needs brings on the scene the treacherous logic of opportunism. That is why it is good occasionally to look back.

The last pages of a book are usually the most interesting, because they record climax. Often the whole book is judged by the



manner in which the author ends his story, be it fiction or fact. This is true of the histories of revolutions also. The final result of preceding revolutions that ended in seeming failure and the sacrifices and sufferings of groups and individuals who resisted alien authority, the grand finale of the Quit India movement would never have been reached. Therefore, although 1942 saw the beginning of the end of British rule in India, the credit for crowning the last phase of our struggle with success must go no less to those of our people who from 1905 onwards (if not earlier) surged forward again and again in defiant action, regardless of consequences. Later, had Gandhiji not ushered in the age of mass upheavals, the patriotic urge would never have seeped down to the people and the Second World War would probably have found the Indian masses in as subservient a state of mind as during the European war of 1918. The courageous deeds of individuals and small groups obviously are by themselves quite ineffective for wresting political authority from alien or domestic tyrants. But for Gandhiji's innumerable campaigns which drew together the masses as no other movement did, we could not have availed ourselves of the opportunities for revolutionary action which suddenly opened up when war came in 1939.

Wars, ancient and modern, are curious phenomena; while they bring death and desolation to many they also unshackle millions of serfs and liberate entire nations from the clutches of imperialists and despots. This paradox made what came in the wake of the World War of 1939 more significant than the war itself. Not only was the ghost of reactionary authoritarianism temporarily at least laid, but India and practically all Asia emerged into freedom. The brave who shed their blood and lost all that makes life worth living, had not perished and suffered meaninglessly. They perished so that others may live not as slaves but as free men. The urge to intensify the struggle for India's liberation as soon as the West plunged into World War II, electrified and gave sharp edge to the thinking of politically conscious India. Jawaharlal Nehru's dramatic dash back from Chungking, the Viceregal declaration that India was at war (without any reference to her true representatives), the withdrawal of Congressmen and Congress governments from Central and later Provincial legislatures came in quick succession. With every rejection of Indian advice and opinion by

Britain, anger and resentment against Imperialism blazed as never before. Britain's contemptuous and arrogant ignoring of the Congress offer to cooperate for defence of democracy, was an intolerable national insult. Many men and women of the then younger generation grew angry at the elder leaders' hesitation to embarrass the British Government. The explanation that Britain was engaged in a deadly conflict with Hitlerism was regarded as weakness. In particular the urgent and repeated appeals to British Liberals and Britain's Allies irritated the hot-blooded. When the attempt to make the British Government (then led by Churchill) realise how absurd it was to expect Indians to offer themselves to defend their Imperial masters failed, there was great joy. Public opinion was eager to have done with endless talks with the Viceroy, the Cripps Mission, etc., etc. What was wanted was preparations for the "Open Rebellion" about which Gandhiji had started writing and speaking. Nevertheless Congress leaders were eager to reconcile their desire to make India a party to the world struggle, with her passionate desire to attain freedom and the search for a compromise continued almost to the zero hour. Eventually a partial concession to the urge for action was made by Gandhiji when he permitted the launching of a "no war effort" campaign, i.e. the individual *Satyagraha* movement. It was a totally inadequate form of struggle and became wholly symbolic. It merely curbed the militant momentarily.

The final Quit India struggle of 1942 thus took a long time to materialise—for many of my generation much too long! This delay nevertheless proved a blessing. By July-August '42, the war was almost at India's doorstep. British armies had retreated from Burma and Malaya. Britain's great Empire was shaking. The Indian National Army led by Subhas Chandra Bose had declared confidently its determination to liberate India. The thought of imminent physical involvement in the great conflagration heightened the militant mood of the people.

When, therefore, on the 9th of August instead of gratefully acknowledging the Congress A.I.C.C. resolution as a sober and statesmanlike offer of partnership in the task of resisting Fascism—albeit on terms of equality—the British struck at the Congress, its leaders, its cadres, its sympathisers, and even the nationalist press, the floodgates of pent-up Indian mass fury broke.



The sincere desire "to seek an honourable settlement" was spurned with Churchillian bombast. A reign of terror as had never been experienced in any part of the Empire began. Men, women and children were victimised for unarmed defiance of "Ordinance Raj". Arrests, imprisonments without trials, lathi-charges and firing on mobs, collective fines, confiscation of property and finally, physical torture—every weapon for crushing the spirit of rebellion was utilised by a handful of Englishmen and their hirelings. This well prepared attack was totally unexpected by the revolutionaries. Gandhiji's exposure of the 'Puckle' circular which revealed what steps Government intended to take had been much too late. For the first few weeks every effort at organising resistance fell short of the desperate and menacing situation that confronted those who preferred revolution to non-cooperation.

One has today to refresh one's memory by reading accounts of what happened to the women of Chumur, the people of Ashti and Ramteh, to hundreds in Midnapore and Ballia, to recapture something of what one felt when they actually happened. But in '42, as the horrible events unrolled, every Indian grew cold with anger. Even moderates like K. C. Neogy and the late Shyama Prasad Mukherjee could not keep calm! And all that the victims had done was to resist the British will non-violently. Naturally the blast of British violence had some effect. The faint-hearted gave up and there was loss of cadres. But it also hardened the few. Attempts to run an underground radio and press and organise such supplies as were necessary for "hampering the war effort" met with constant failures. In spite of this they carried on. Mass fury subsided after six months of glorious assertion of its might, and Britain's agents bent all their energies to the task of unearthing the underground relentlessly. The brave new "republics" of Satara, Midnapore and Ballia had frightened the government even though they were short-lived. The increasingly "insolent" behaviour of the Indian army and navy terrified the White man. (Later, after the 1946 naval uprising it was to demoralise them completely). But in the absence of a substantiating mass rising, the revolutionaries of '42 began to experience an enervating spiritual exhaustion. But it is to their everlasting credit that they never surrendered. Young men and women who lacked leadership, experience and ideology plodded on unrelentingly in the flickering light of the fire that was lit on August 9 in Bombay. They tasted misery in full measure and

much suffering, but there was exhilaration and upliftment also.

Eventually came freedom but with it came also great sorrow and mourning. Imperialism's parting shot split our country. Was it necessary to allow this division? To prevent the division of India, it was argued would mean another struggle, possibly some form of civil strife and of course further suffering to all. This was not palatable to the leaders of the Congress because the fear of not being able to lead and guide the struggle haunted them. Some of them had even repudiated many things that happened during the first instalment of open revolution. Deviation from non-violent principles and the right path were put forward as the reason for decaying the role of the new leadership that had temporarily emerged. Marching with this distaste for new ways of defiance and new forms of struggle was another fear in the minds of a few in the Congress. In the next round, along with alien rule the influence of Indian privilege and property might also disappear.

The end, for those who had seen the vision of a completed revolution was dismal. Inexperienced, lacking dynamic leadership, their fine spirit of recklessness ridiculed by those who played for safety, the "Augusters" of 1942 grew dejected and gradually drifted away either to different groups or into complete inaction.

Will the lessons they learnt be of no use to the country? Or, as has happened elsewhere, will their disappointment help others who may read of their doings when history is written, to more intelligent ways? Only time will answer that question.

Luck, August 15, 1960.



How can we ever forget this voluntary gesture on the part of one whose time is very precious and whose organisation is in hourly demand by builders who range from people who want luxurious mansions to those interested in large educational and clinical institutions not to speak of scores of housing units. But for the hard work of builder Harbans Singh's sturdy men and women who spared no effort when faced with nature's tricks with the soil or its monsoon fury, we may never have accomplished its completion in this brief period. These brave men and women from Rajasthan and elsewhere will soon be leaving. But we hope some day they or at any rate their children will know that for once they built a house the owners of which mean to dedicate it to the well-being of working people.

Every age leaves the stamp of its peculiarities on the brick and mortar dwellings the people make for their use. The historic monuments of bygone years are mute witnesses of the sort of life lived by our forbears, reflecting their social and economic scheme of things. Wisdom lies in knowing that these old historic monuments were very modern when they were built and that the modern world's skyscraping towers when they in turn become ruins, may rouse nothing but posterity's casual curiosity after a few generations have used them.

While taking satisfaction in the completion of a programme one cannot but admit to oneself that in this phase of our national economic evolution multi-storied structures are very incongruous. Invariably all around them lie huddled mud huts and rag and tin hovels reminding us of the tremendous distance between the many and the few in our country. That embarked as we were on a mission that required a base of concrete and steel and much modern equipment, a building of this kind was necessary was clear to us; but many a friend still wants to know why a band of convinced Socialists should have thought in terms of a multi-storied structure usually associated with multi-millionaires rather than ordinary folk. The answer is that in a social situation in transition towards industrialisation one either falls in line with all the requirements of efficiency or gets left behind. If we were to accomplish what we had set out to achieve, namely, a modern printing press in the heart of New Delhi's 'Fleet Street' area, we had to abide by regulations prescribed by Government for press build-

### 3. Behind Link House

MORE often than not, ideas and ideals tend to remain in the clouds. Like aircraft awaiting landing signals they keep hovering in the air much to the annoyance of impatient passengers. That is how I can best describe the years and months during which the idea of organising United India Periodicals (the name came afterwards) was debated. That the venture would lead to building a multi-storied structure was not in the calculation of any of the sponsors in the first instance. It was a dramatic enterprise to which we found ourselves committed in the course of our work. Mobilising resources from money to men and diverting them to a project that requires precision and efficiency is an adventure that requires above all business-like techniques which few of the originators of the scheme possessed in the professional sense of the term. Therefore for most of us the endeavour was adventurous and exciting with all the hazards attending such efforts. To amateurs like me the problems stemming from the decision to house *Link* and other journals that may follow it, and to set up an adequate printing press seemed infinitely complicated and at times tiresome. But good fortune was with us in the sense that seeing our plight, many a distinguished expert and official befriended us with truly generous and magnificent aid. Now that the many blueprints have been rolled up and the structure that they represented has emerged as a solid mass there is no point in doubting the fact that it is the very same building which Shri N.K. Kothari and his fine team of young architects and engineers had conceived with imaginative care.

But for the artist in our architect we could never have acquired an aesthetically satisfying place to spend our working lives in.



ings in the Capital. Hence the size of this establishment and therefore the cost. In an age of extreme competition between conflicting and contradictory interests the race to reach the chosen goal has to be run on terms set by the dominant group in society, those in control of the commanding heights—social, political and above all financial.

Our aim of establishing an adequately large and efficient printing and publishing organisation owned and maintained by people who believe that the cause of spreading intellectual enlightenment suffers greatly if left to commercially oriented owners of concentrated property compelled us to follow apparently in their footsteps. The power and influence of the printed word can be mobilised either to debase or ennoble minds. They can either be used in the service of or against the fundamental interests of the people. In a society such as ours it is dangerous if not fatal to permit monopolisers of the people's wealth to become monopolists of their spiritual and intellectual assets also. Those who have sought to transform society have always felt the need to use means other than the spoken word for influencing thought and action. Gandhiji and his predecessors felt the need to propagate the message of liberation and to outline its tasks in journals and news sheets which in their times moulded public opinion far and near. Jawaharlal Nehru also had to turn journalist and author. Every leader of significance in our movement for freedom has been, in fact, a journalist, essayist and pamphleteer by turns because each one of them in their turn realised that as the craving for knowledge grows those who seek mere profit at its expense would exploit this necessity of man and divert minds into irrational and obscurantist directions.

There is no better example than Gandhiji for those who set out to organise the transport of information. Despite the stresses and strains of militant activities he never lost sight of his duties as a journalist, a writer of chaste prose in *Young India* and *Harijan*. He realised that all that is new and living has constantly to battle against the deadweight of past ages and that in this struggle a modern and efficiently organised press is a powerful weapon. Since both the forces of reaction and the forces that take life forward are able to utilise the same instruments there is no alternative to mobilising financial and technical resources in as big a way

as one can. The challenge of big money compels us to adopt a course of action that calls for extremely hard and persistent work. And it does one good to notice the dawn of a new awareness about the job of the press in shaping social policies in our country.

This is perhaps inevitable because political freedom by itself can never be an end. Once free, a people, and particularly those who think for them and with them begin to feel the need for examining the social relationships that society imposes. The beliefs and modes of thought and life of earlier periods are examined and their validity in terms of existing situations questioned. To guide the traffic in ideas in such periods of transition, to direct them away from slogans empty of purposive content is the function of men and women who have assumed the responsibilities of intellectual leaders. Writers, be they journalists or novelists, poets or dramatists form the cultural vanguard of every society. It should be their endeavour to explain continuously and cogently how ethics and morality are ultimately linked with economic and social realities, why the truths of yesterday can no longer satisfy the urges of today, how new values are the result of changes in social relations, and finally and most importantly, they must affirm and prove that truth, scientific or otherwise, is absolute only in the sense that it is a balance of continuity and change. To help men and women who are gifted to undertake this task of dispelling darkness, institutions such as the one to which *Link* belongs are necessary whatever the cost entailed.

Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Link House on Saturday marks the beginning of a new chapter. His presence among us will enthuse and inspire the workers who have laboured untiringly in the press, at editorial and administrative desks, *Link's* correspondents and representatives everywhere, and last but not least those charged with the responsibilities of directing the affairs of this organisation. It is our sincere hope and earnest belief that we shall do our very best to deserve the privilege of his interest in our endeavour.

*Link*, July 1, 1962.

\* \* \*

*Link* began publication on Independence Day eleven years after India had attained freedom and reaches its eighteenth year of existence as a weekly newsmagazine. Throughout these exciting



years it has tried its best to live up to its first Editorial promise that "it will try to avoid prejudice and be true to fact. It will demand unprejudiced treatment from all in return, and always be ready to be judged by the purity of its purpose and the honesty of its methods". Naturally, it is for *Link's* readers to say whether or not it has been able to live up to its objectives. If political life in India had been lacking in dynamism and had been following a straight line unresponsive to a rapidly changing national and international situation, it would have been easier for a news journal to keep to the straight and narrow path, rigidly following the beaten track. And *Link* could have yielded to the temptation to become "popular" only at the cost of giving in to unhealthy and retrograde trends in a social order that is on the whole trying to take the path of progress against heavy odds. *Link's* readers, however, owe it to this journal to point out its acts of omission and commission and thereby help in its improvement.

Eleven years after Independence was a fairly long span of time to come to the conclusion that the Indian intelligentsia was getting confused about the great objectives for which the people had struggled relentlessly decade after decade from the earliest years of this century. The promoters of this journal were well-known individuals belonging not only to political parties, but almost all the major academic professions. Before it was actually published on August 15, 1958, V.K. Krishan Menon, Dr. A.V. Baliga, K.M. Panikkar, M. Chalapathi Rau, D.P. Mukherjee, Bishnu Dey, Pothan Joseph, S. Vaidyanathan Aiyer and a few of us decided that India needed a magazine that could every week carry out a summary of news, both Indian and world news, and that would provide basic information to those who were seriously interested in understanding India's role in shaping events. This team of well-known advisers was assisted by young journalists who were dedicated to the idea that the Indian people's march towards the goal of peace and prosperity would not be easy. Despite the magnetic personality of Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues of the pre-independence era, the quality of the rank and file of Congressmen had begun to deteriorate. During any struggle for emancipation the noblest in man comes to the surface; once political power, total and absolute, is achieved the finer characteristics slowly but surely recede and the elemental urges of personal ambition take the upper hand.

The result is the jettisoning of ideals and ideological moorings. Then the men and women who flocked to the victorious Indian National Congress were by and large out to achieve selfish ends, forgetting the oft-repeated pleadings of Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru that ends and means must always be such as to lead to the undoing of the wretched legacy of a long period of servitude—making the Indian masses aware of their rights and responsibilities, curbing the desire of the few to fatten on the toil of the millions who were the true masters of the motherland and, most important, restoring India's dignity in the comity of nations by working tirelessly to rid it of its backwardness.

Amongst the many messages *Link's* first issue received from distinguished compatriots, the one that was most thought-provoking and meaningful was from Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the then Vice President of India. I cannot resist the desire to quote it: "If civilisation consists of science and scholarship, of arts and letters, it is possible only in a democratic society. These are the results of what a man does with his solitariness, to use Whitehead's account of religion. The great achievements of science, literature and philosophy are the products of individual genius, its thought and meditation. They cannot flourish where injustice, discrimination, ignorance, superstition, and arbitrary power prevail. We must fight them within the nation if we are to quicken the minds of our people. Einstein observed: 'It is quite possible to assert that intellectual individualism and the thirst for scientific knowledge emerged simultaneously in history and have remained inseparable ever since'."

By 1957 it was clear that Jawaharlal Nehru was aware that unless the Congress became once again the spearhead of national unanimity on all the major issues confronting the nation, its progress would be chequered and that obscurantist, acquisitive and anti-national forces would gain the upper hand, undermining the unity of purpose which is essential for a democratic socialist-oriented India, pulsating with the energy that a new sense of freedom should give the people and their leaders. He was equally aware that although imperialism had suffered a tremendous setback with the emergence of free countries in Asia and even Africa, its tentacles were searching out for weak spots everywhere so that it may reassert its monopoly, whatever be the new mantle it



adopts. How correct he was in his assessment has been borne out by facts and events that are well known to every thinking and forward-looking individual in every country in the world.

Jawaharlal Nehru's thoughts and observations struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts and minds of the promoters of this newsmagazine and long hours were spent in working out the frame of reference for its contents, its name, size, manner of presentation, etc. Krishna Menon, one of the chief architects of the plan, chose *Link* as the name because he felt (and all of us agreed) that this journal must link all those who shared the Nehru ideal of a new India.

How to meet the cost of production of a journal that must not be drab in appearance, not indulge in sensationalism to attract readership, not yield in its principle of working for a social order of society, remain unattached to any political party and yet appeal to the emerging intelligentsia were our major problems. But for the unstinted support of Jawaharlal Nehru and many of his distinguished colleagues, and above all the wholehearted generosity of Dr. A. V. Baliga whose fame and affluence were a legend in India, *Link* could not have dared step out and join the then existing fraternity of weekly journals.

The success of this endeavour is not to be measured in financial terms, or in terms of massive circulation. Many friends have complained that it is too serious a newsmagazine for the younger generation of today. They feel that we ought to be more jazzy in every sense of the word, not over critical of the Arts and specially the film world, have features which can excite the imagination of those to whom politics is a "bore" and cater to the modern youth's craze for "modernism" whatever the term may mean. However, it is difficult for men and women who believe that the educated elite must be identified with the working masses, at all levels, to respond to these well-meaning suggestions. If earnestness of purpose is tiring for the adolescents, then *Link* may not be for them. If, however, the English knowing Indian is aware of his obligations to the millions who cannot think because they have neither the means nor the leisure, he will realise that a serious journal helps to create public opinion that will (in fact, must) bring about a change in the entire social, political, educational and art world of our country. Then a journal such as *Link*, even if read by a few,

will be more meaningful than a fast-selling comic or sensation-mongering news-sheet.

Certainly values do change but there are certain eternal verities of thought that cannot change and as far as possible sensitive minds must add to these verities and not degrade them.

An *Link* enters its 19th year, it faces many dangers but those who are not afraid of facing challenges do not deserve to survive.

It is my belief that *Link* will survive because a few can do much provided they are courageous and do not fear a life of austerity, long hours of un-rewarded work and a determination that the quality of life of our people must improve rapidly if this nation of vast wealth is to make its long suffering masses the true masters of their future. I believe that such men and women will be found who will join the small band of workers in Link House and think that it is worth their while to serve the cause of intellectual integrity.

*Link*, August 15, 1976.

\* \* \*

TWENTY years ago *Link* was not much more than an idea. During the first ten years of freedom the political skyline in the country was dark and fearsome. News of disturbing fratricidal conflicts poured into Delhi from the northern and eastern regions. Anger and anguish followed the partition of India and the consequent uprooting of millions of men, women and children from their age-old homes and surroundings. The first free governments of the land both at the Centre and in the divided States faced grave challenges. Normal administration was beset with stupendous difficulties. The nation's leaders realised, even before the ink was dry on the documents they had signed to finalise the transfer of power from the former rulers, that the price the British had extracted was being paid in terms of the death of millions of people of all classes and wide devastation. The poisonous seeds sown by the imperialists over the two centuries of their domination turned even decent men into insane beasts. Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru and others laboured day and night to pacify the sufferers and resettle the mass of uprooted humanity. The healing words of Gandhiji had a soothing effect. However, despite the gradual calming down of passions, peace ultimately prevailed all over the country only after two fatal bullet shots had pierced the gentle



heart of the greatest Indian of our century. Men who, somewhat hypocritically, pay lip service to their belief that freedom came to India in a uniquely non-violent manner, do not of course want to acknowledge these facts. In reality, freedom claimed the sacrifice of countless men who mounted the gallows, thousands who got killed, others who were ruined in the looting and burning of their possessions. And, finally, even the man who loved and cared for this country more than his own life had to be crucified.

Hardly had the agony of the nation subsided after such civil conflict, the people had to learn to defend the nation's frontiers and they began learning it the hard way. The aggressive invasion in Kashmir, soon after the declaration of India's independence, taught our armed forces their first lesson in the defence of the country.

Positively, the first decade of freedom was India's crucial and formative period. The evolution and completion of a democratic Constitution proved that politically conscious Indians were aware of the need to guarantee the people's social and economic freedom, their right to equal opportunity. The task of giving concrete shape to the many conflicting ideas and ideologies and reconciliation of contradictory aspirations and interests was undertaken in all seriousness by men and women chosen by the people to evolve a constitutional framework for the translation of their dream of a democratic, free and just social order into reality.

These first ten years after Independence were indeed full of meaningful events. Laying the foundation of a new Nation-State was the main occupation of a team of seasoned and dedicated political leaders under Jawaharlal Nehru's enlightened guidance. The basic features of modern India's superstructure owe their texture to his vision. He wanted India to be an equal among equals on the world scene. He wanted India to be a revitalised nation in Asia which should combine the pursuit of economic growth with the objective of the liquidation of exploitation in all its forms as its objective, a country that should be free of any involvement in imperialist and expansionist ambitions, dedicated to world peace.

This was also a crucial period in our relationship with the capitalist and socialist countries. Simultaneously, our attitude to peoples who were waging a struggle against imperialism in Africa, Asia and elsewhere was also taking concrete shape. Naturally, it

was not smooth sailing for those who shared Nehru's beliefs because there were others who held the view that India could prosper only if it followed the trail laid down by West European and American believers in a so-called "free world"—free for the gendarmes of aggressive imperialism and international capitalism.

In brief, this was the political backdrop when a group of men and women thought of producing a journal devoted to the task of explaining socialism to intelligent people. They believed it was not enough to be politically independent; that freedom was not an abstraction. Also it was important to convey through its columns the real nature of the subtle and aggressive forces at work all over the world to undermine the gains of victory over the Hitler menace. The implications of the cold war had to be explained because, if not exposed and ultimately defeated, it could, once again, plunge the world into a new catastrophe. At the same time in India, as elsewhere, there was an extremely well-orchestrated campaign to suggest that Communism was a new menace, was worse than Fascism, and that the menace emanated specially from the Soviet Union and People's China. Anti-Communism had found its first adherents amongst those who belonged to the then Congress Socialist Party. The group that thought about the new journal was composed of men and women who had participated in many struggles from the thirties up to the "Quit India" movement launched on the 9th of August, 1942. Some of us "Augusters" had left the Congress after independence; we were free from any ideological aversion to Marxism—unlike some influential socialists who had gained considerable popularity during the "Quit India" movement but later turned anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet and joined the "cold war" brigade in India, equating Communism with what they called "totalitarianism". Our small "Left Socialist Group" had discovered that quite a few influential industrial workers who had joined the freedom struggle, some experienced and competent journalists, young lawyers, doctors, etc. in many parts of the country agreed that we should function independently of all known parties of the Left, Right and Centre in India. The politically ambitious among them fell away later but most of the others were inclined to accept Marxism and agreed that it was necessary to carry its message to factory workers and peasants. It was of course not possible to keep an unidentified formation like ours going for long. Eventually, each one of us drifted into political parties of our own



choice.

By the end of the first decade of independence, i.e. from 1947 onwards, persons belonging to the Congress and others began to feel the need for an informative, independent newsmagazine. The venture thus took shape in 1958. The motivating idea of such a journal, it was felt, should be to interpret the significance of scientific socialism in a situation wherein Parliamentary democracy was unable to provide expeditious solutions to the problems of poverty to any significant degree. Capitalist industrialisation by and large had failed in its 'mission' in India.

Our plans for *Link* would not have borne fruit were it not for the inspiration, guidance and concrete help of men like V.K. Krishna Menon, Dr A.V. Baliga, K.D. Malaviya, Biju Patnaik and a band of enthusiastic young men such as P Viswanath, K V Shambhudatta and many others who rallied round Editor E. Narayanan. Once this team had prepared the blueprint, the search for financial sustenance received Dr Baliga's ever generous response and active co-operation. It was left to V K Krishna Menon to suggest a name and after checking and re-checking a long list, he asked us if *Link* would do. The name had to be short and suggest the main objectives of the weekly, which was to unite the Left and progressive forces in the Indian National Congress and those outside the established Left parties. *Link* thus appeared, after months and months of planning, on August 15, 1958, twenty years ago.

Jawaharlal Nehru was consulted on many occasions while we were in the process of clearing the hurdles. His eloquent message to its Founder-Editor enthused the closely knit team of men and women. And when *Link* appeared on the news stands for the first time, it was hailed as something new in journalism, with reading material for serious students of politics, a journal produced by patriots and meant for patriots. However, with each passing week *Link* became a subject of controversy. Its sharply critical approach offended the over-sensitive and its radical content annoyed the conservatives who believed that it was spreading "dangerous" ideas. Those hostile to any advocacy of a socialist solution to the problems facing the people accused it of allegiance to a "foreign" ideology, and V K Krishna Menon, who was then Defence Minister, became their favourite target. Politicians who could not tolerate his bluntness, his intellectual brilliance and caustic wit were

particularly prejudiced against the magazine.

*Link* in its first decade of existence received more brickbats than bouquets. But it mattered little to us, for as long as we, who were responsible for its publication, were convinced that it would not be a plaything in the hands of power-politicians, nor a scandal sheet meant to denigrate individuals and that it would never compromise on the essentials of our national aspirations, we could look anyone in the face, meet any challenge. The difficulties of maintaining the standards set by its first Editorial team were enormous. But it tried its best to live up to its own goals and when young talented young men, who had participated in various phases of mass struggles, came forward to work for the paper, our hopes soared. We began to feel that we were not quite alone. The sustenance we received from politically significant personalities, who were associated with the journal from its inception, enabled one and all to work hard, mindless of the meagre salaries and wages they received. But for this courageous band of writers and workers, who did not use *Link* as a prop for successful careerism or personal benefit, it would never have survived the opposition of powerful financial interests and those who represented them in the power structure of our country. In the beginning of the second decade, from 1968 to 1978, our people's political maturity deepened sharply. General elections indicated a gradual awakening amongst the millions of people working in the fields and factories or wherever men and women toiled for their living. A determined will to fight for a better life and stepped-up organised action through trade unions became increasingly evident. This had its own impact on the electoral front, wherever well defined political parties entered the contest. For the very first time, at least in an Asian country, the CPI (undivided) won a majority of seats in the Kerala Assembly, which enabled it to form a Government led by E M S Namboodiripad. While the masses all over India were jubilant, amongst the reactionaries even in the then ruling party (the Congress) there were adverse reactions. Nehru and his senior colleagues like Maulana Azad and Govind Ballabh Pant accepted the verdict of the people in a democratic spirit. But ironically the so-called "younger" generation of second-rank Congress leaders were violently agitated by this development. This and its consequences were an indication of the events were to follow.



Another significant event of the ten years from 1958 to 1968 was the liberation of Goa from the clutches of Portuguese Fascism. The downfall of this tiny enclave held on to by Salazar, an independent dictator and oppressor of his own people, overjoyed the African freedom fighters in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. Were Jawaharlal Nehru not the then Prime Minister and V. K. Krishna Menon his Defence Minister, Goa's freedom struggle may never have culminated in victory. These events were landmarks in our post-independent years and *Link* can claim with a certain degree of satisfaction that it championed all the popular movements of those years. The success vindicated *Link's* understanding that if the Left forces unite in thought and deed reaction could ultimately be vanquished.

The nation's and *Link's* greatest year of tragedy came in 1964 when India was plunged in deep sorrow as the news of Nehru's death hit the people—specially all those who looked upon Jawaharlal Nehru as the friend of the friendless. We felt like orphans; his death brought back memories of the day Gandhiji was assassinated in January, 1948. There was anger also. The anger was due to the fact that his untimely end was brought about by the betrayal of the Chinese when they invaded India in 1962. It was common knowledge that he respected and loved the people of China and its leaders and always acknowledged their culture and civilisation, always espoused their cause in the UN and elsewhere. When China emerged victorious after its valiant struggles against Japanese imperialism and its allies, Nehru had been among the first who hailed it as the dawn of a new era. What saddened him greatly, besides China's treacherous and unprovoked aggression, was the reaction of his own countrymen, particularly members of his own party. Instead of rallying round him and the country, they derided Nehru's cherished beliefs, heaped ridicule on the basic features of his foreign policy and specially his assertion of friendship with Communist countries. Outwardly calm, he grieved inwardly, more so when his party men insisted on the dismissal of Krishna Menon, a life-long friend and colleague, a person on whom he had relied on many matters of international importance.

*Link* was, also, fatally afflicted by another tragedy the same year when news came from London that Dr Baliga, its greatest

landfactor, had passed away following a heart attack. Some years later, another tragic death took away Krishna Menon from our midst. With the passing away of these three magnanimous personalities, who were in their own way architects of *Link*, it lost its most sincere well-wishers.

*Link* and its contemporary *Patriot* have now entered a period which can be described as extremely hazardous. Death has taken its toll by robbing us of one, who though much younger in years than many of his older colleagues, literally slaved for *Link* from its earliest years: P Viswanath, who died last year. However, *Link* must not enter its third decade in a spirit of defeatism. Many problems will confront it in a political climate that lacks rationality, many improvements will be necessary to make it a better instrument for clarifying the confusion prevalent at all levels. The concept of social revolution cannot be a static idea, it will have to evolve from decade to decade. *Link* must never cease to strain every nerve to do so, however uphill the climb.

Young men and women of vision with a progressive world outlook will surely join our depleted ranks, because very often adversity and danger attract the brave. History is full of instances where periods of stagnation are followed by periods of renewal. However remote the goal, Socialism has appeared on the agenda of almost every political party. The forces that yearn for the establishment of a socially free and equal society will reject "artificially manufactured" individuals who vulgarise it and claim to be national leaders—their "drill sergeant" is "hunger", said Nehru. Therefore, eventually, they will be unified under their own leaders who identify themselves and share their hardships.

I would personally wish to think that when *Link* observes its 30th Anniversary, it will surely have justified the optimism of its promoters.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1978.



## 4. Thoughts on an Independence Day

We are supposed to see ourselves as we are when reviewing national achievements and failures on national anniversaries. But do we dare to give expression to what we see in the privacy of our inner thoughts? Our attempts to speak the truth become in reality exercises in avoiding the unpalatable. Is this so because we are afraid of the effect of truth's acid on our audience, external and internal?

Glossing over facts, underestimating here and over-emphasising there, reviewers normally like to give what may be called an optimistic account annually. Independence Days and Republic Days are probably observed not so much for a realistic stock-taking of the vast management of men's affairs but to impress upon them that however acute their individual misery, the nation has progressed according to plan. To make darkness look like light and crooked things look straight seems to be the primary function of utterances at such celebrations. If for a change our planners and leaders could give a list of un-attained targets, of what could not be achieved and why, the individual whom "the State" is supposed to serve, would benefit considerably. If the vast body of individuals knew why they must earn what they do and not more, why prices should be as high as they are, why they must live in hovels, why wait for hours in a queue and so on and so forth such knowledge would help them bear their burdens more courageously. Broad generalisations are apt to confuse them because they contradict immediate and daily experience. If ordinary people could only know why disparities have to be tolerated, why some children can have four meals a day and their own little ones must content with one or less, it might enable them to take the initiative necessary

to altering their lot. If they knew why crime must follow punishment like night the day insofar as they and their millions of fellow citizens are concerned and yet some "at the Top" can evade the law by allying in and out of legalities and regulations, they could be effective allies of those who really mean what they say about putting out corruption.

Why should equality of sacrifices mean less for them and more for the dwellers on the top storey?

Our "man in the street" audience would be grateful to all of us who assume the right to think for them if sometimes we could stop telling them what to do and what not to do, and instead satisfy their many curiosities about their own barren street life, their little world of small anxieties, their many desperate problems that never get solved.

Nineteen-sixtythree has been the most trying of all years since independence. Not only because it began when the whole nation was wondering why a friendly neighbour had suddenly turned into an enemy but also because it revealed the poverty of character of those who otherwise dash about giving the impression they were the inheritors of our independence. Their panic knew no bounds and they were indignant with the Prime Minister for refusing to ask for American troops to halt the invading armies of China. If American soldiers could fight in Korea why not on the Himalayan heights, they argued. They never bothered to think of the consequences of such intervention. What was uppermost in their minds was not that the nation's freedom was in peril but that their petty wealth would vanish. And surely no price was too great for preventing such a catastrophe. Fortunately, this class and this type of individual is in a hopeless minority even among the wealthy privileged and they should not be taken too seriously. Even so, the mentality of depending on others to defend our freedom by providing us with materials (if not men) has received much encouragement of late and reveals a serious flaw in our thinking. If the concept of independence does not imply fearlessness and absolute reliance on one's own resources how can we face our enemies and opponents as a free people?

It is our 480 million men and women who have to defend their country and not armies imported from across the seas. Why should others shed their blood for us in wars that may be forced on



us by China or Pakistan? And during the nightmarish days of Chinese onslaughts weren't the millions ready to do and die for their country and demonstrate that they were not afraid? Should invasion be resorted to again by either of these inimical neighbours the panicky and faint-hearted should rest assured that their own people are able to resist the enemy. The cup of our national humiliation will be full the day we think in terms of allowing others to defend our soil, to die for it, while we remain in the rear.

How do others see us as a people, as individuals? In the course of my recent tour abroad what was obvious was that India and Indians evoke a variety of reactions. They differ sharply from one country to another and the differences reflect the particular political and social ethos of the countries. In the Soviet Union an Indian is a much sought after person for several reasons. They seem to like everything about us, the colour of our skin endears us to them and our eyes they say are beautiful, some very attractive. Soviet girls have married our boys because of these glamorous qualities. Soviet women are fascinated by our feminine ways and of course our *sarees* and *salwars* appeal to them very much. Those who study our languages, both men and women, adore our literature, our culture, our architecture and music. Our films have a special attraction for them and now after the Indian exhibition our consumer goods and *tandoori* cuisine have been added to the list of things that make India and Indians good. The Soviet citizen's response to us is so natural, so free of all race and colour prejudice that it makes one wonder what makes the white-skinned people of the Western world so sure of their superiority. In the warm smile that greets one in Moscow's streets, hotels, lifts, taxis, etc., immediately makes one feel at home. But it would not do to think that they like us merely because of our romantic past and our old historical links with their country. They like us because they yearn for peace and India's Nehru is a man of peace and therefore a friend. Fortunately, his image as a peace-maker has not been blurred despite constant efforts by Chinese propagandists to paint him as a war-monger. This faith in Nehru's integrity is shared by statesmen and commoner alike in the Soviet Union and their freindliness to us flows from this understanding. They see us as projections of India, ancient and modern, struggling to rise from centuries of stagnation, even as they had to struggle in the past against feudal oppression.

The spirit in which the English people react to us Indians is quite different. It is a queer mixture of contempt, affection, regard and romance. Having once belonged to their system, we are as yet not as apart from them as we would have been had that historic contact not been established. Of course, they will never forgive us entirely for having broken away but they are shrewd enough to see that there is no escape from co-existence with people one doesn't really approve of. Since our hybrid culture grew under their supervision and none can honestly admire imitation products, can we blame them? And yet paradoxically enough England has the largest Indian population of any European country, with the number of Indian restaurants multiplying almost hourly. Nostalgic memories of days when Englishmen and women lived in India still haunt many of them but that does not necessarily make them warm up to us. We perhaps know one another too well to be impressed with our respective virtues of character and culture.

Illusions have also their uses. Very often they make life rich and interesting. Since neither the Indian nor the Englishman can have any illusions about each other we will perhaps go on glaring across the fence for some time yet.

Link, August 15, 1963.



If this is the major challenge in our present situation, is it not our imperative duty to plunge afresh into the mind and thought of Nehru, discover what is imperishable therein and use it as a frame of reference for comprehending the forces with which we must reckon?

Collectively and individually, every Indian must be held accountable and responsible for the safety, well-being and progress of this magnificent land and its people to make up for Jawaharlal Nehru's loss. Thus, after Nehru, if we could justify his passionate and uncompromising belief in democracy, the problem as to who will now replace him will resolve itself.

If those whom the people have elected as their representatives place above individual ambitions and carry on the gigantic struggle for uprooting inequality, war and poverty with the zeal and devotion of Jawaharlal Nehru, then only will he have not lived and died in vain.

We who have had the good fortune to live with him for the best part of our lives received our baptism at a common altar. He taught me and my generation to think clearly even as Gandhiji helped us to act instantly. We were fascinated by his scientific bent of mind, his impatience with conservatism, his utter unawareness of social categories of caste and religion and more than anything else his tremendous capacity to think in terms of the wide world and its problems.

Thus for the youth of the early thirties and forties of this country he was the symbol of everything new and modern. His ideas swept us off our feet because they were like a breath of fresh air blowing away the cobwebs of our feudal and colonial past, challenging us to revolutionize everything that stood in the way of absolute and undiluted freedom.

Every aspect of Jawaharlal Nehru's personality fascinated us and inspired us. He was our faultless and flawless idol, ideally perfect. In our own ways we tried to be like him, to live up to his expectations, and often to earn his approval was enough, the highest reward that the heart could desire.

Neither time nor age could blur the radiant image of Jawaharlal Nehru of our youth because we refused to allow ourselves to be overawed by the fact that he was India's Prime Minister. If ever

## 5. On The Death of Jawaharlal

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, our beloved, has taken leave of us. The unimaginable has happened. His tireless spirit has been stilled by the inexorable law that makes death the ultimate goal of all life. In innumerable homes in our country and the world over, there will be mourning for long.

For us the very thought of having to face life without Jawaharlal Nehru is alien and uncomfortable and full of desolation. How shall we reconcile ourselves to the fact of his absence from our midst? He meant so much to so many throughout these last forty years of Indian history that his sudden withdrawal has deprived us of our mainstay. A sense of insecurity unknown in his life-time has already begun to haunt us. A feeling of uncertainty about the shape of things to come robs our peace of mind as we think of the world without Nehru, of India without Nehru, and last but not least of the Indian National Congress without Nehru. Truly may we ask: "Whither India?" now that Jawaharlal Nehru has gone to rest, his voice silenced, his being a part of eternity.

As a great and good age of our history comes to an end and we wander through its corridors, many names of eminent Indians come to our mind. Men who thought and lived nobly, worked, suffered and died for freedom from bondage and stagnation. Will the era that now commences in India find an adequate leadership rising to heights of nobility and integrity, fearlessness and forthrightness, so that the process of regeneration may flow on uninterrupted and unhampered, conquering all that is evil in humanity, rescuing it from violence, pettiness and greed? Or will we be compelled to acknowledge that henceforth only puny minds will be available to India because the best among us have vanished?



there was a barrier between him and the likes of me it was because of this high office. To see him surrounded by hordes of careerists, both official and non-official, to see him yield to them where he should have resisted them firmly, dismayed and hurt us and at times we felt bitter and became cynical. Outwardly and even organizationally these moods often led to estrangement and aloofness. But these spells of withdrawal were merely passing phases because in every crucial test we found ourselves ranged with him and against those who questioned his fundamental social and political faith.

Will we be able to live courageously even after him, or will work and life become too much of a burden and drudgery? If the brave among the youth of today take over the torch that Jawaharlal Nehru lit our remaining years need not be dismal and dark. Should however a pall of ignorance and indifference keep them away from the field of action, our generation will truly be written off as a lost generation, aimless, empty and adrift.

*Link, May 31, 1964.*

## 6. The Nehru Legacy

### BASE FOR INDEPENDENCE

THIS is the first Independence Day without Jawaharlal Nehru. He will never again address the nation from the Red Fort rampart. His voice, rallying and admonishing the people by turns, teaching them and pleading with them to think and act in unity, will not ring in their ears.

For sixteen years he held us under the spell of his personality and we either echoed his thoughts or reacted to them. There scarcely was ever a day when over the radio or in the Press his name was not mentioned in connection with some new event—or his opinion reported. He explained, annotated, criticized, encouraged a whole people as if they collectively were a single person. He told them their history, asked them to join with him in wondering over the marvels of their land and sea and rivers. This became news, interesting, refreshing and reassuring. He discussed every problem in terms of its immediate applicability and relevance but always there was the postscript of its future significance. When reading his writings or hearing him speak, whether one agreed with him or differed, there was satisfying feeling that it was with a mind superior to one's own that one was in communication. His learning which he carried so lightly was great and his capacity for comprehension stupendous. He reminded us always of the past; but the assurance that in him we had a leader who reflected all the forward movements of the 20th century also, was complete. He wanted his country and his people to belong to this wonderful age of science and technology; but his objective was always a society based on equal rights and opportunities, and it was his utter de-



votion to this ideal that endeared him to millions of people not only in this country but all over the world.

Every year, on Independence Day and Republic Day, he rendered his account to the people in terms of this ideal by telling them what they had achieved and why and where they had faltered and failed. But with a phenomenal sense of history, he also could make the people understand that failures and difficulties were inevitable and demand patience from them for their own weaknesses. There were quite a number of Indians who often thought that Jawaharlal Nehru was ignoring the stark and ugly realities of life after Independence and that he was not doing enough to eliminate poverty and curb the acquisitiveness of powerful individuals and groups who sought to exploit our newly achieved freedom to their own advantage. Nevertheless, his image as India's most selfless and dauntless leader was never blurred in the minds of those who were the worst victims of social and economic inertia, while paradoxically, his sourest and most cruel opponents were those who had benefited most from freedom and flourished in the sunshine of his magnanimity. Their lip-service loyalty to him was a cover under which they carried on ceaseless whisper campaigns.

Now that the post-Nehru era has commenced, inevitably the situation has changed. Gradually but surely the people will realize the need to assert their will and use the mechanism of the Indian Constitution with greater discrimination and sense of ultimate goals. Gone are the years when the people would vote as Nehru wanted them to and gone the times when their sense of security was confirmed by his physical presence, the cementing qualities of intellect and the boundless love he bore his people. As the yearn roll by new and as yet unpredictable forces will be released for good or evil. Much will depend on our collective ability and capacity for organizing ourselves. None of us can afford to think, feel and act as we did when Jawaharlal Nehru's genius and energy was at the disposal of the nation.

Every problem now needs to be studied afresh and in terms of the contradictions that exist between a poverty-stricken people and powerful influences that do not want poverty to be ended too soon or too completely. Every programme must now be examined not in terms of the hope their solution might inspire; but in those

of immediate applicability and the social and economic privileges they might destroy or help to maintain. The seventeen years that Jawaharlal spent in leading and guiding were the years of preparation, the years during which the foundations of democracy and equality were laid. It is now time for every politically conscious individual and parties made up of such individuals to search their hearts and honestly assess their achievements and their shortcomings and realistically resolve on patriotic programmes. A new pattern of political activity closely related to day-to-day issues which face our people will have to be created if there is not to be a general withdrawal of public interest from the activities and programmes of political parties.

In this great undertaking the Congress can set the example. As long as Jawaharlal Nehru lived and led there was no question whose opinions would count and whose advice taken. The millions who make up India looked over the heads of their political leaders and seeing him concluded that he himself would never stray from his course. This was particularly true of the Congress. The bickerings between groups of leaders within it, the ever increasing talk of corruption, the pathetic deterioration of idealism and the constantly increasing influence of petty comfort on the lives of Congressmen brought in their wake feelings of revulsion and anger; but the people forgave those responsible because in their minds they were not truly important quantities. Beyond and above them stood one, incorruptible, steady of purpose and great enough to redeem all their sins of commission and omission. This great redeeming influence is gone and the Congress will be judged by issue and leader by leader, each aspect of policy and performance, each exhibition of pettiness or magnanimity being taken into consideration by a critical people.

It may be possible for a few months or years more, for Congressmen who have become influential or powerful through office or association with wealthy people to appear big and swagger about; but public opinion will judge them sooner or later, and the later it is, the more bitter will be the judgement. If such relentless judgement, which will involve the whole party and not merely the individuals who bring it about, is to be escaped the leaders of the Congress should set about cleaning their houses earnestly, keeping in view the larger interests of the nation and not immediate



tactical advantage for a group or a section of the party; and this effort should be undertaken not as a measure of political expediency but as a historic obligation it owes to the people of India because the Congress more than others had the privilege of the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi and the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. These entail on Congressmen an inescapable discipline of selflessness and loyalty to principle and ideology.

The Congress is India's largest party. It is also one of the world's most important socialist parties. Its leaders cannot afford to behave hereafter as if they were representing different elements in a movement which requires from them only a minimum of agreement. Neither can they act as lucky individuals who have been placed in positions of power and influence by chance or a great leader who could be held responsible both for policy and performance. The Congress will live or perish and those who lead it be able to claim that they partook in the progress of a nation, or be compelled to confess that they utterly failed, according to the choice the organization—that is the majority of active men and women in it—will make in the immediate future.

It is true that if the Congress organization breaks down there will be for a time a "vacuum" in our politics; but such a situation will not continue for long. The people will find an alternative. The people, however, need not be forced to do this. If the Congress can find enough dedicated people within it who will accept responsibility without insisting on the formal privilege of power, who will lead the people without making a lucrative profession of leadership and who will honestly fight for ideals and an ideology the organization will be able to consolidate all the forces of progress in the country and defeat every element of corrupt reaction and cowardly conservatism in our society. This requires in the first instance courage in the present leadership to insist on ideological and organizational discipline and to weed out whatever is unnecessary or unhealthy.

Ours is a rich heritage. No country can claim in one generation two leaders of the stature and qualities of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. That they and not others were accepted and cherished by the people is proof that India's millions are politically mature and wonderfully sensitive. What these two beloved sons of India have left behind in terms of tradition, example and ideas

constitute a peerless treasure house. If we who knew them and were inspired and educated by them cannot put out inheritance to proper use, we will go down in history as a generation of futile men and women deserving nothing but obloquy and shame.

## NATION, UNITY, DEMOCRACY

Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership has been described by Western sociologists as charismatic. The love and affection which the people of India heaped on him could have made a lesser man an autocrat. In fact, long before independence in an anonymous article carried by a leading journal of those days, he had himself warned his admirers of the danger of his becoming a dictator. Conditions in India in the fifties were extraordinarily favourable for him if he wanted to assume dictatorship. In most of the neighbouring countries power was passing into the hands of extrovert individuals. Within the country, the influence of the Congress was declining but his personal popularity and influence were at their height. Inside the Congress there was no one to challenge his leadership.

As Chester Bowles has said, "Jawaharlal Nehru's political power was supreme to the point when he could easily have pursued the course of one-man rule which leaders in other developing countries have taken".

His true greatness lies in that he used his vast personal influence to strengthen and build safeguards against one-man rule; he changed the contours of existing political institutions, gave them a new content and provided a new meaning to their inter-relationship. He sought to demolish the social bases on which one-man rule could come about and the barriers that might retard the growth of democracy.

It fell to him to lead the nation in its transition from a backward looking, fragmented entity, held together only by the force of tradition, into a modern, intergrated and self-moving community. He was aware of the "difficult and dangerous position" in which he was placed when he decided that he would lead the people's march to become a nation. He therefore laid down for himself a style of functioning which would enable him to play the role assigned to him by history.

Addressing a foreign audience he once said, "A prophet, as we



all know, speaks the highest truth but is usually stoned for it. He is honoured afterwards, no doubt. But the leader has to adapt the truth as he sees it to circumstances in order to make it acceptable because a leader is a leader, more specially in a democratic country, only insofar as he can carry his people with him.... Therefore, a leader occupied a difficult and dangerous position. He wants to adhere to principle and truth as he sees it. But, inevitably, he tends to compromise".

But he went on to say, "Compromise with truth is a dangerous thing. Once you start compromising, you may go on compromising till you are at the bottom of the pit, because no standards are left. Nevertheless, there is no other way for a leader but to adapt himself (remembering always the principle) to circumstances to the extent that he must. Therefore, while I lay down high principles, I recognize that countries cannot, as countries or as governments, function purely on the basis of high principles. I have to consider the facts as they are, the difficulties of a situation, the dangers in it, and adapt myself to them but remembering the principles all the time".

Commentators, Indian and foreign, have often been baffled by his strong advocacy of radical policies and the compromises which he affected in actual practice. Some have ascribed his "lapses" to his awareness of the need for unity in the national movement. But that is only a partial explanation. The fact is that he was essentially a democrat and throughout his life he worked for building a democratic society in India, fighting against the separatist and divisive forces which weakened democracy, and in his definition of democracy, the role of the Opposition was always very important. To carry the largest number possible without making compromises on basic principles was his most important political objective.

During the struggle for independence, the demand for provincial autonomy and a federal structure at the top was a factor working for unity in the national movement but as a student of history he knew that federalism contained seeds of divisiveness and that in the past it was always disunity which led to domination by foreigners. Yet, a unitary government, he knew would not be acceptable. As Chairman of three important committees set up to define the principles underlying the Constitution (the Committees for

States, Union Powers and Union Constitution), he pleaded that a very broad interpretation should be put on the jurisdiction of Central subjects (Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications). He wanted to leave minimum scope for divisive forces to operate and therefore sought for the Centre "powers implied or inherent in or resultant from the express powers of the Union".

Defending the provision for nomination for the Governors of the States by the Centre, he said, "We should always view things from the context of preserving the unity, stability and the security of India". He had also learnt from history that political instability had always opened the doors for outside intervention. While opposing the demand for the introduction of proportional representation, he said, "I can think of nothing more conducive to creating a feeble ministry and a feeble government".

At the same time he knew that unity could not be maintained from above. He, therefore, waged almost a single-handed fight against Hindi chauvinism and secured recognition in the Constitution for regional languages. Not that he was unaware of the splitting potentialities of linguistic chauvinism and regionalism. In fact he felt that Hindi alone could be our national language, and no one contributed more than he did to securing for it its rightful place in the country.

Both when the Constitution was being framed and today religious differences constitute a more serious threat to national unity than linguism or even regionalism, and it was largely due to Jawaharlal Nehru's efforts that the principle of secularism was embodied in the Constitution in the Articles in Part 3 which deal with Fundamental Rights and Article 325 which provided for "one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency".

Provisions in a Constitution alone, however, do not transform a tradition-bound society into a democracy. No one was more conscious of this than Jawaharlal Nehru. Through incessant campaigning from public platforms and in Parliament, he sought to change our feudal outlook blinded by superstition, into a scientific, secular and modern approach to life. By his own example he sought to build conventions in Parliament to stabilise conditions in which discussion, exchange of views, persuasion and argument could be possible.

It is sometimes said that in the absence of a strong Opposition



parliamentary democracy is transformed into one-party rule which is no better than a one-man rule or at best the rule of a group. No one helped in building up the Opposition and in creating conditions in which it could function, as much as Jawaharlal Nehru did. Men like Jayaprakash Narayan expected him actually to organize the Opposition also for them. This of course he could not do.

However, he realized, as he himself said, that by itself political democracy was inadequate. On one occasion he posed the question "What is democracy?" and answered: "Democracy is something deeper than a form of government—voting, elections, etc. In the ultimate analysis, it is a manner of thinking, a manner of action, a manner of behaviour. If the inner content is absent and if you are just given the outer shell, well, it may not be successful". He added, "Political freedom under economic pressure is very limited freedom".

For him democracy was not an end in itself. It was a means for building a self-generating society. When still engaged in our struggle for freedom he sought to place before the country the ideal of a socialist society. But characteristically before he made socialism acceptable to the leadership he brought it round (at the Karachi session in 1930) to accept the fundamental rights of the people which would give to a democratic society a socialist content. Step by step he got the leadership to accept the goal of a welfare State when the Constitution was being drafted. Later, it was recognized that such a State could operate only in "a socialistic pattern of society".

By the time he passed away even the opponents of socialism could not openly come out against the objective of socialism. It was in this manner that he sought to condition national thinking in terms of basic principles and ultimate objectives. Every compromise that he made in principle was a step forward in the direction of the ultimate objectives. The Constitution did not accept socialism. But, later, Parliament approved it as the national goal. In the Constitution, sanctity of private property was recognized. But he so changed our thinking in the course of years that the provisions of the Constitution are being amended one after another to enable socialist property relations to come into being.

That was how he paved the way for further progress. But he

created not only psychological conditions for our progress towards the goal; he also created an institution which could give the desired direction to our progress. The Planning Commission did not have statutory powers; it may only be an advisory body. But during his life-time he made it an effective instrument for providing leadership to our economic effort.

Progress is possible only if we are able to live in peace. The biggest danger to peace is the emergence of the armed forces as a decisive political factor. He sought to curb political ambitions in the armed forces by, on the one hand, creating in them an awareness of their responsibility and obligation to society—the speeches he delivered whenever he met men of the armed forces and the talks he gave in the army messes fully bear this out—and on the other by asserting the supremacy of the civil authorities. When an Army Chief of the Staff questioned the decision of the Minister concerned, Jawaharlal Nehru laid down the dictum that the decision of the Government was final.

From where he left us we have still to go a long way to reach the objectives defined for us by him. We can advance on the road he charted only if we have the integrity to strengthen the institutions he built and the courage to transform them whenever they become outdated.

### PLANNING FOR SOCIALISM

Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of India was a harmonious blend of political and economic democracy. Striving to his last breath to make it real, he blazed a trail that no future leader of this country dare forget.

When the great struggle to rediscover their national personality began in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Indian people realised vaguely the need to look upon their task as not merely to end political subjugation but also to establish economic freedom. Yet it was only with the advent of Jawaharlal Nehru that the latter aspect of independence became meaningful to our teeming millions. Conscious of the class complexion of the National Congress, which he once described as "petty bourgeois", he was alive to the socialist imperative—power for the working people. He foresaw earlier than most others that the forces which three



decades back were "weak but growing rapidly" would develop and demand their rightful shares of the fruit of the nation's independence. And it was to give the people a social philosophy that would explain and justify such a demand that he tirelessly worked throughout his life.

Jawaharlal has been variously called "Herald of a New Epoch" and the "Creator of our social and political elan". He himself never claimed such titles. All that he strove to do was to remind the people of their "tryst with destiny", and of the need to "redeem their pledge", for without doing that, they would again lose their personality. On his part he fought consistently to redeem this pledge, not as a leader seeking power, but as part of the national mainstream, that is the people.

The first occasion when he deliberately attempted to give the national platform a clear economic content was when he drafted the famous Karachi Resolution which said that "the State shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping and other means of transport". Later, when Fascism "spectacularly" successful in providing employment to the German people, began to draw lurking admiration from certain sections of our people, he directed his own efforts to give a rational, socialistic orientation to the Congress programme. And as the Soviet model of planned development was the only scientific pattern that embodied this outlook, he felt no hesitation in advocating the need for integrated national planning on socialist lines.

This clear perception of the need for planning led Jawaharlal to conceive of a National Planning Committee a whole decade before independence. When this Committee was set up under his chairmanship, he made it clear that its function was to give guidelines for a Plan to make free India industrially strong. He removed the cobwebs in the minds of the members of the Committee about the compatibility of largescale industries with Gandhiji's total support to cottage industries. "There can be no planning", he said in his note of December 21, 1938, "if planning does not include big industries; but not industrialisation alone. To make freedom real to the common people the organisation of economic life must (also) conform to the principle of justice to the end that it may secure a decent standard of living".

His keen sense of social justice as well as the need to free a predominantly rural economy from the fetters of feudalism to enable it to contribute its surplus for advancement led Jawaharlal to lay stress on agrarian reforms. His live contact with, and leadership of, the oppressed peasantry of UP convinced him that the objective of all land reform should be to make the tiller the master of his land.

Rapid economic development through integrated national planning with industry as its core, and a radical transformation of the rural economy through land reforms were thus the key-points in Jawaharlal Nehru's programme for a Free India. He set out to emphasise their importance from the day he assumed the responsibility of office in the Interim Government in 1946. In the din of today's controversy about the direction of the Fourth Plan, it is not often remembered that the question had been debated and conclusively answered by the Congress as far back as 1948. In that year the All India Congress Committee stated in a resolution, drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru, that "our aim should be to evolve...an economic structure which will yield maximum production without the operation of private monopolies and the concentration of wealth, and which will create a proper balance between urban and rural economies. Such a social structure can provide an alternative to the acquisitive economy of private capitalism and the regimentation of a totalitarian state".

This declaration formed the basis of Nehru's famous "Middle Way" which, for all its "middleness" totally rejected India's development along a "capitalist" path. The "middleness" related only to the means to be adopted to reach the objective, and not to the objective as such. These means, as he often stressed, had to be "democratic", that is, based on persuasion and consent, but always directed at propelling the economy, and the polity in general, towards the ultimate objective of a socialist society. This is evident from the different stages through which he made the Congress traverse before the heterogeneous organisation came to accept the establishment of a socialist state as its specific objective.

Working assiduously on his colleagues, striking often unpalatable and embarrassing compromises with their conservative stand, and at the same time carrying on a ceaseless campaign of education among the people to make them conscious of the need



for socialism, Jawaharlal attained his cherished objective of committing the Congress irrevocably to a socialist economy and a socialist State. At first all that it would agree to was the establishment of a "Welfare State" (1956). Thence to a "socialistic pattern of society" (Avadi 1955) and finally to an unmixt "Socialist State" (Bhubaneswar 1964)—the journey was no doubt, arduous, and not without detours that made the more impatient of his followers doubt the firmness of his convictions, but it was also a saga of a man's struggle to make his fellowmen drop ideological and other blinkers from their eyes and see the light of reason, as he saw it.

The idealism of the National Planning Committee he soon discovered had to be tempered with the realisation that the Congress and the Parliament had to be accustomed to the idea of transformation, and planned, deliberate State action to that end. The first steps, therefore, had to be necessarily halting. The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948, which today looks almost like a chapter from any of the FICCI brochures, embodied this approach. The First Five-Year Plan, with its accent on agriculture, and little or no provision for basic industries, reflected this early hesitant approach. Both aimed at familiarising the people and the Congress with the idea of planning without creating a scare amongst the conservative and the unconvinced. But later, when their hesitation had been somewhat overcome, and the people as a whole began to perceive in planning the only possible way to economic advance, Jawaharlal Nehru became more positive and the Second Plan reflected this.

Intensive consultations with renowned Marxist academicians from abroad and with uninhibited but socially aware economists at home, preceded the preparation of the Plan-frame in 1955. This was the first deliberate effort to indicate to the people that the attitude of the Congress to economic policy was changing. The State, whose role had till then been only that of general superintendence of economic processes, was now called upon directly to undertake the establishment of basic industries and lay the foundation of a self-reliant economy. The investment in the public sector in the Second Plan was raised to a level twice that of the outlay on private sector projects in order to enable the State to have a "commanding position" in the economy as a whole. The "Nehru

pattern" of planned economic development took another step forward, although, as the subsequent developments showed, it was still hedged in by vestiges of the earlier equivocal approach.

In the realm of policy the change was marked by the replacing of the earlier industrial policy resolution by a new one. This, the 1956 Industrial Policy Resolution, clearly reserved a wide range of basic and strategic industries for development exclusively by the State. It also declared the Government's intention to undertake State trading, whenever found necessary. Besides reserving certain industries for the State, the Resolution also clearly indicated the "other industries, which are essential and require investment on a scale which only the State, in present circumstances, could provide, have also to be in the public sector". The rest of the industries could, however, be developed in the private sector, with or without State participation.

The 1956 Industrial Policy Resolution, which formed the basis of the Second Plan, was in fact the expression of the Avadi Resolution of the Congress declaring the establishment of a "Socialist Pattern of Society" as the objective of the organisation. It was no generalised expression either, but a concrete directive to the Government to propel the country towards socialism.

The Second Plan faced heavy weather when it was half through. The reasons for its crisis had little to do with its framing, or the economic policy guiding it. They were the reflection of a strange dichotomy between the objectives of policy and the apparatus of administration which was to plague him to the end. While sensing the dangers arising from this dichotomy, and always trying in his own way to correct it, he never allowed it to scare him. In fact, with every reverse his determination to pursue the course of planned development became firmer.

The result was the Third Five-Year Plan which, in spite of shortfalls in the preceding plan, was framed with the perspective of making the State a decisive factor in the economy. The hurdles it has come to face in its first years are again a reflection of the dichotomy which had marred the progress of the Second Plan.

In the sphere of agriculture, the famous Nagpur Resolution of 1960 was part of Jawaharlal's redemption of his pledge to the peasantry. Ceilings on land to get hold of a surplus to redistribute to the landless, and cooperative farming, the two cardinal princi-



ples underlying this resolution, could have certainly revolutionized our rural society, but for the fact that powerful elements in the Congress party scuttled its implementation at the State level.

Jawaharlal was not oblivious of this glaring gulf between what he—and the nation with him—proposed, and the administration disposed. In fact, in his last phase he was increasingly restive at the snail's pace of the country's progress. Bhubaneswar, with its categorical commitment not to a socialist pattern, but to a socialist state, was his response to this phenomenon. His agony was not without reason. He could hear the rumblings of an approaching storm, of our people losing their faith in peaceful means unless the Congress showed the "necessary sense of urgency". Through the Bhubaneswar Resolution, and the Kamaraj Plan, and a rigorous application of the principles embodied in them he wanted to sweep away the dirt and the cobwebs that had accumulated—both in the party and the administration—as the result of his liberal approach.

But he could not finish his task. Will those who claim the right to carry forward his policies have his courage and his vision? If they do, they should admit that the Industrial Policy Resolution is being flagrantly violated, even to the extent of allowing foreign participation in basic industries. Otherwise, too, foreign capital, against which Jawaharlal sounded the tocsin as early as 1956, is being openly courted and welcomed. The grand edifice of a socialist India, which he laboured all his life to construct, is beginning to be lampooned as a doctrinaire fad. These are dangerous portents which the people who cherish Jawaharlal's heritage have to strive hard to avert.

#### FOUNDATION OF NONALIGNMENT

The most convincing testimony to national sovereignty is capacity to exercise foreign policy. In the final analysis that nation is most independent which can choose most freely and practice without restraint its policies in regard to others. By this test India is one of the most independent nations in the world today and, no amount of sarcasm about our poverty or our dependence on economic support from foreign countries in the press or in pot-boiled books can hide that fundamental fact. Indeed much of the gloating

references to our indigence in the newspapers of American and other Western countries can be traced to a sense of anger caused by the awareness that in spite of acknowledged economic and military superiority Western powers have not been able so far to make any dent in the independence of our foreign policy.

Jawaharlal Nehru was solely and completely responsible for this great national achievement. The magnitude of his success can be grasped only if the obstructions he had to face and the peculiarities of the decade in which he defined non-alignment and practiced it with supreme virtuosity are borne in mind.

The Second World War ended the epoch of formal or explicit imperialism. But it created a situation in which many people were convinced that only such nations as allowed themselves to be herded around a commonly accepted master-nation could hope for true security. Mr Walter Lippman, for example, wrote towards the end of the war that the world would soon be divided into the Atlantic, the Russian and probably the Chinese spheres of influence, these three super-nations providing security for satellite neighbours and therefore, also laying down the laws that would govern their relationship with the rest of the world and between themselves. Mr. Lippman, it is true, was not thinking of a Communist China then but of possible stabilization of the authority of Chiang Kai-shek. That detail, however, did not fundamentally invalidate his short-sighted analysis.

The manner of the war's ending and the permutations of power that followed appeared to give substance to geopolitical speculations such as those of Spykman and to consolidate the belief that for the next century or so at least, all major foreign policy decisions for all Governments would be made in the capitals of the two super-powers, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. The choice for the rest was limited to adhering or opposing decisions already made, according to the terms of vassalage between the two master-powers and their respective clients. Jawaharlal Nehru like other sensitive observers of contemporary developments perceiving this dangerous perversion of internationalism wrote well before the end of the war: "The two outstanding facts emerging from the war are the growth in power and actual and potential wealth of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.". He very precisely foresaw that "Britain and the U.S.A. will tend to seek each other's company and support as



against the U.S.S.R. group of nations". He also saw a "tendency to expand, if not in territory then in other ways" in Stalin-ruled Soviet Union and, regretfully admitted that "some of the developments there have come as a shock to many of its old admirers" among whom he acknowledged was one.

What was the reaction to such a polarization in this man who was writing in jail? He answers it with a question: "Where do the hundreds of millions of Asia and Africa come in this picture?" They would decide, he asserted, after getting answers to some more questions: "Does it (the polarization into blocs) help towards our liberation? Does it end the domination of one country over another? Will it enable us to live freely the life of our choice in cooperation with others? Does it bring equality and equal opportunity for nations as well as groups within each nation? Does it hold forth the promise of early liquidation of poverty and illiteracy?" He admitted that these questions were "nationalistic" but explained that "this nationalism seeks no domination over or interference with others".

These questions he asked on behalf of as yet unfree Asia and Africa defined the scope and purpose of nonalignment which he later made the linch-pin of his own foreign policy and which he repeatedly said was no negative retreat from responsibility. Non-alignment on which he staked his own and his nation's fate immediately after he assumed office, was for him, from the very beginning, a positive and dynamic attitude vitally necessary for all developing countries both for economic growth and for escape from the suffocating grip of geo-political gangs of disillusioned Governments who had sold themselves blindly into the bondage of "blocs".

Any study of Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy therefore becomes a study of how he practised non-alignment. The attitude of satellite countries being entirely decided in the early post-war years by Washington and Moscow, his main concern when he began his career as Foreign Minister of India, was to define his relationships with these two powerful Governments. His assertion that he would remain uncommitted was viewed with anger and sometimes contempt in both the camps. Every move he made was viewed with intense suspicion. When India voted for the Veto in the U.N. in 1948 the American Press and its jackals in India

asked. When anything he said or did appeared to be in the least different from the rigid "lines" that Stalin drew for every section of humanity, he was attacked by the Soviet Press and the Indian Communist Party. But between 1948 and 1950 he laid the foundations for independent action in the United Nations, made it clear to both the super-powers that neither wheedling nor bullying could divert him from the path he was marking for himself and established a relationship of friendship that was totally sincere—on his part—with China.

Unaware of the basic role that machiavellian opportunism plays in the political philosophy of Mao Tse-tung, Jawaharlal Nehru accepted China's Asianism as a sincerely cooperative approach to world problems. The fairly obvious indications of Chinese differences with the rigidities of Stalinism perhaps made him totally unsuspecting of China's true intentions in Asia. The acceptance of *Panch Sheel* by Peking, hypocritical as later events proved it, convinced him for a time that Indian non-alignment would be respected by the Chinese leaders. He firmly believed that this Indian friendship established on the basis of non-interference would be a factor for stabilizing not only the freedom and economic independence of India and China but also be a source of inspiration and help to all Asian and African movements against imperialism and economic domination. We thus find that in the first five years his effort was to keep India uncommitted as between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., to refuse to be browbeaten by either of them, to establish a true alliance with China and to help wherever possible the struggles for independence in Asia and Africa.

He never regarded relationships with close neighbours like Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon as entirely in the sphere of foreign policy. He was always ready to make the maximum concessions to them and never lost the hope that the utter sincerity of his attitude of equality and cooperation would sooner or later be accepted and welcomed by the Governments of these countries. As soon as Burma and Ceylon began showing signs of enthusiasm for social reorganization of their economies and stated their foreign policy intentions in terms of non-alignment his approach to them became uninhibitedly warm. As for Pakistan, the continuous efforts by her Government to interfere in the communal affairs of this



country, to its insistence on continuing the aggression in Kashmir and its unprincipled alliance with the Western military bloc made him intensely suspicious. He regretted till his last days the need for spending so much on defence because of Pakistani aggressiveness and was always ready to come to terms provided Pakistan acted independently and honestly.

The changes in the foreign policies of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. following the death of Stalin and John Foster Dulles were profound; but in regard to India they largely consisted of openly admitting the validity of Jawaharlal Nehru's propositions. This recognition that the Indian attitude stemmed from the love of independence was spontaneous, warm and patently sincere in the case of Prime Minister Khrushchev. It was forced, inhibited and opportunist in the case of American leaders. Naturally Jawaharlal Nehru's reactions were conditioned by the quality of the recognition. In post-Stalin Russia and its great leader, Khrushchev, Jawaharlal Nehru found a firm, understanding and courageous supporter of non-alignment. He responded to the sweeping changes that Khrushchev brought about in the Soviet Union's foreign policy with uninhibited and unreserved welcome. Indo-Soviet understanding indeed became, from 1954 onwards, the most important factor in India's own foreign policy and a compulsive influence on the foreign policies of many other countries. But for the undeviating attitude of friendship between the Soviet Union and India which was cemented by a mutual personal regard, rare among the leaders of big nations, between Jawaharlal Nehru and Khrushchev, the American and the British attitude to non-alignment would have continued to be one of contempt, and suspicion. That it had to be changed, at least officially and formally, to one of grudging tolerance was a great triumph for Jawaharlal Nehru, not because it brought in its wake any concrete advantage to India, but because withdrawal of open opposition to non-alignment by the American Government loosened the frozen attitudes of several satellites of Washington. America's interest in such mischievous contraptions as the Seato and the Cento became less intense, disillusioning in the process, a number of Asian young men who had till then been more loyal than the King.

Another consequence of Indo-Soviet friendship becoming a major factor in our epoch's international affairs, was the total ex-

perience of Chinese chicanery and opportunism. In the course of the rapid attacks made by Chinese leaders in the last few years on this friendship, the political philosophy that Mao Tse-tung claims to be Marxism-Leninism has been proved to be nothing more than an Asian version of geopolitics, its objective being the gathering together of a number of client countries that will serve as a protective cover immediately, and eventually as a field for exploitation.

Jawaharlal Nehru advocated non-alignment in no isolationist spirit. His goal in trying to release small nations committed to the great powers was to create conditions for a world order of national entities whose equality of status is acknowledged irrespective of their military capacity or political ideology. He succeeded splendidly and many Western critics who had scoffed at him in the beginning had to admit before he died that but for him and his insistence on non-alignment for all developing countries the world on several recent occasions might have slipped into a war no one wants. He himself never made any such claims on behalf of the theory of non-alignment. He often said that whenever India was free the tendency had been towards non-involvement. He was always humble in regard to the role that this country has played or can play in world affairs. In 1950 he said, "I do not say that India as she is can make a vital difference to world affairs. So long as we have not solved most of our own problems our voice cannot carry the weight that it normally will and should". But he taught us that even when all our problems are solved and we are capable of exerting our real strength, it will be worthless unless it is exerted on the side of freedom for all peoples and fairness in the dealings between the richer and the poorer countries, between the so-called Great Powers and the small nations.

### ALLIANCE WITH THE OPPRESSED

As in the rest of the world so in West Asia and Africa India is identified with Nehru and Nehru with anti-imperialism, with friendship for all nations struggling for freedom, with the people of all colours and races resisting oppression and aggression. Not only for the Arabs but for all West Asian and African peoples India's role during the Suez Canal crisis and the tripartite aggression, the spontaneous and total support that Jawaharlal Nehru extended to



Egypt, is an unforgettable part of their history. Jawaharlal Nehru took up Egypt's cause as his own. "Some extraordinary things have happened in the last two or three days", he told Congressmen in Hyderabad, "the first was the sudden invasion of Egyptian territory by Israel. Remember there was no declaration of war, it was a sudden unheralded invasion of Egyptian territory on a large scale. It was a breach of armistice, it was a breach of the rules of the UN Charter, it was clear, naked aggression.... In all my experience of foreign affairs I cannot think of a grosser case of naked aggression than what England and France are attempting against Egypt".

The "predatory methods" adopted by the Anglo-French imperialists outraged the conscience of Nehru and for weeks he was concerned was the Suez crisis. In a letter to President Nasser he wrote, "If colonialism succeeds in coming back to Egypt, it will reverse the entire course of history and return to every country from which it had been forced to go. Therefore, colonialism should not be allowed to succeed in Egypt. Otherwise, it will signal a new and long fight for the whole of Asia and Africa. Nasser publicly expressed his gratitude for the help he received from Nehru's India. During his visit to this country four years ago he said, 'India's moral help had a tremendous impact on world opinion, while India's material support to us was an economic blockade was imposed on our country after the outbreak of the aggression helped us enormously'".

Nehru first came into touch with revolutionary Arab leaders during the World Conference against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression at Brussels in 1927. That was the time when the Arab national movement was just beginning to acquire organizational shape and several young Arab revolutionaries had come to Brussels after overcoming innumerable obstacles. Jawaharlal admired their revolutionary optimism and wrote in his report to the Indian National Congress: "The Arab revolutionaries from Syria and North Africa were very different. Typical fighting men, who understood independence and fighting for it, unprepared for little else, and were wholly untainted with the slavish mentality of more intellectual races". In the conference Nehru met and moved a resolution on Mesopotamia (Iraq). The British, who were the real rulers of Mesopotamia in those days had not permitted any Iraqi to attend the Brussels

conference. Nehru took it as his responsibility to champion Iraq's cause. Since "Indian troops had conquered and were stationed in Mesopotamia and a large number of Indian clerks and employees were taking part in the exploitation of the country", he said, "it was up to us to demand the recall of the army of occupation and to say that we wished to be no parties to this imperialist adventure."

After Nehru's return from Europe, the Congress policy towards the freedom movements in other countries underwent a radical redefinition. As Congress moved towards a redefinition of its national objective as Complete Independence, it also got rid of its inhibitions in extending full-throated support to the other countries fighting against imperialism. At its Calcutta session in 1928 the Congress, on Jawaharlal Nehru's advice, adopted a resolution on the Arabs' struggle for freedom and expressed its "full sympathy with them in their struggle for emancipation from the grip of Western imperialism which is, in the opinion of the Congress, a great menace to Indian struggle for freedom". The Arabs reciprocated the sentiment. Chedly Ben Mustafa, the renowned leader of Tunisia's Destour Party, who had met Nehru at Brussels, in a message to the 43rd session of the Congress, wrote to Motilal Nehru: "We realise also that your fight is only an episode in the great world movement for the liberation of all oppressed people... At the moment when you affirm your wish to have no compromise with imperialism, our party sends you its sympathy, its encouragement and assurances of its solidarity with you... I should assure you, my dear comrade, that the people of Tunisia have the most ardent wish for the triumph of India's cause".

The Wafd Party of Egypt, first under the leadership of Saad Zaghlul Pasha and then Nahas Pasha, kept close touch with the Congress and its leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Saad Zaghlul called Mahatma Gandhi the "spirit of resurgent Asia". The two leaders met when Gandhiji was coming back from London after attending the first Round Table Conference. The great Egyptian poet Shouqi hailed their meeting as the coming together of two ancient cultures and the confluence of the Nile and the Ganges. A few years later, on his way to Europe on the eve of World War II, Jawaharlal Nehru paid a visit to Egypt and held long discussions with the Wafd leaders on the possibilities of coordinating the anti-imperialist struggle in the two coun-



tries. He invited Nahas Pasha to attend the forthcoming Congress session. A year later, a five-member Wafd delegation was given a rousing reception at the Tripuri session of the Congress which felt "proud" in extending warm greetings to the Egyptian leaders whose presence "symbolised the solidarity of the movements for freedom in Egypt and India". Subhas Chandra Bose in his presidential address paid warm tributes to the Arabs for their "courage, determination and the sacrifice made by them in their struggle for national freedom which naturally evoked the admiration of the Indian people who wished for the complete success of the Arabs in the attainment of their objectives".

**Symbol for Youth:** As India's struggle for freedom gathered force, Jawaharlal became a symbol of courageous and uncompromising anti-imperialism for the Arab youth and intellectuals. Young students in such far off places as Khartoum memorised Nehru's speeches and writings which were smuggled from Cairo. Several faced corporal punishment because they refused to part with his books and insisted on displaying his photographs.

One of the main reasons for Jawaharlal Nehru's universal popularity in the Arab countries was his unequivocal opposition to the British policy in Palestine. As early as in 1937 the AICC, acting on the advice of Nehru and Azad, passed a resolution condemning the "reign of terror" established by the British in Palestine "with a view to coerce the Arabs into accepting the proposed partition of Palestine", while a few months later the Haripura session of the Congress denounced the British decision to impose "partition of Palestine in the teeth of Arab opposition". It asked the Jews in Palestine "not to seek the shelter of the British Mandatory power and not to allow themselves to be exploited in the interest of British imperialists". The Tripuri session, after welcoming the Wafd delegation, strongly deplored the Zionists' role of aligning themselves "with the British armed forces to advance their special privileges". The partition of Palestine a few months after India's bifurcation shocked Nehru who on his way to London stopped at Cairo, visited the Arab League headquarters and personally conveyed to Azam Pasha, the Arab League Secretary-General, India's concern at the establishment of Israel and her sympathy with the Arab refugees.

Unlike many other world leaders Jawaharlal Nehru was quick

to see the potentialities of the Egyptian revolution which India welcomed as enthusiastically as she had earlier welcomed the Kemalist revolution in Turkey. After Bandung where Nehru and Nasser developed an intimate friendship, India began increasingly to exercise a direct influence on the minds of the Egyptian leaders. Nehru seldom went to Europe without breaking his journey in Cairo where each time, in Nasser's words, "he talked and we listened to him for hours". Socialism, planning, land reforms, positive neutrality—all the chief components of Nasser's policy were to a large degree hammered into shape in these discussions.

Some Indonesians might have a different opinion today, but it is a fact of history that from no country did Indonesia receive greater help during its struggle against Dutch imperialism than from India. Independent India was then just emerging on the world scene; and its economy and administration were still to overcome the grievous damage caused by partition. But she did not hesitate to extend her fraternal hand to an Asian nation engaged in a mortal combat with colonialism.

The impact of India on the countries of Africa has been at two different levels. At one level the educated Africans watched with great interest the Indian struggle for political and economic independence. They assumed that the freedom struggle which India was waging would have immense consequences for their own countries; they looked upon Gandhi and Nehru not only as the leaders of the Indian national movement but also as the leaders of a world-wide movement against colonialism and fascism.

At another level the Indian settler population in East and South Africa was observed with suspicion. Wherever Africans came to know Indians as merchants, traders and civil servants, they appeared to be the tools of British imperialism, mercenaries, who were satisfied with the crumbs of exploitation.

Nehru saw the Indian struggle in its international setting more clearly than any of his contemporaries. He realized that any strengthening of European domination in Africa would affect India adversely. He also realized that in the final analysis British and other European imperialisms would be liquidated totally only when the struggle against them was truly Afro-Asian. He was one of the stoutest champions of the Ethiopians in their struggle against Fascist Italy's unwarranted aggression. At the same time



the Indian National Congress under his leadership did everything in its power to see that the British settlers did not discriminate against the Indians in South and East Africa.

As long as Africa was held in bondage, in his opinion, there could be no peace in the world. Repeatedly at the United Nations, the Indian delegation, under his instructions, attacked colonialism and gave every support to Africans. Till some of the African countries became independent, and could themselves press for the liberation of those territories which were under colonial rule, it was India that championed the cause of African independence.

India's internal policies, the principles and methods of Indian planning have also not been without effect on Africa. African leaders are today firmly convinced that only a planned economy can solve their problems. The idea of democratic planning as practised in India has had considerable impact on African countries like Nigeria, Uganda, Tanganyika and Malawi.

Jawaharlal Nehru believed that efforts would be made whenever possible, by imperialism to return by the back door after ceremoniously walking out of the front. This happened in Congo and he did everything in his power to help the United Nations to establish a truly independent government in Congo and to minimize the dangers of great-power intervention.

There is one part of Africa where India has a special interest—East Africa, consisting of the territories of Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. In all these countries there is a settled Indian community. It was expected that on the achievement of independence, India would pursue a more active policy in protecting the interests of Indian settlers. But from the very beginning Nehru made it clear that the Indians who had settled in these countries should regard it as their home, and their loyalty was to the land they had adopted. The Indian High Commission instead of behaving as the custodian of settler interests cultivated African politicians. The Corfield Report on the origins of the Mau Mau in Kenya, in fact, blamed the Indian High Commission for having actively encouraged African nationalism.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1964.

## 7. A Year Without Nehru

A WHOLE year has gone by without Jawaharlal Nehru amongst us. Even so the dull ache of final separation refuses to subside. Banal efforts to remind ourselves of what he meant to us and the world, to mourn and sentimentalize over our loss will continue, but they cannot really express adequately the degree of our impoverishment.

'Had we but world enough and time' to ponder and muse over the inner meaning of events which Jawaharlal Nehru shaped and to which he contributed so much, our grief and sorrow would have purified us. Instead, we are pushed from crisis to crisis unable to overcome our weaknesses and regain self-confidence as individuals or as a people. In fact as the shadow-filled year since he passed away comes to its end, we are still missing him intensely—almost bitterly angry with him for having allowed death to have its way, to deprive us and to prevent him from keeping his unfulfilled promises. Why could he not have lived on, is the petulant irrational question one asks again and again because there seems to be no substitute for his personal guidance, as the threat to our freedom and security and to peace in the world increases hourly.

And yet, were Jawaharlal Nehru to read these lines I can well imagine him chiding the writer for being immature and sentimental, foolish and defeatist. A negative approach annoyed him beyond measure and he would have rebuked us for being men and women of little faith and small courage in not being able to face the world fearlessly.

A thousand fleeting memories crowd in as I think of the long years of my apprenticeship in the era in which Jawaharlal Nehru led us. In the early years of our struggle we looked at him as we do



at a distant star. He was ever so much more remote than Gandhiji because somehow we felt that to establish communion with Jawaharlal Nehru one had to attain a degree of intellectual comprehension and sophistication to which I felt I had no claim whatsoever. With Gandhiji it was quite different; there was no need to be inhibited, he took us as we were, raw but robust, questioning us and arguing with us, almost encouraging us not to think but act instinctively, setting at rest all intellectual doubts, urging us to have faith in the principle of *ahimsa* and resistance to evil. When in later years I began to think (almost in spite of myself) I suddenly found that I was agreeing with Jawaharlal Nehru's approach. Gradually the compulsion to take sides on controversial issues like negotiating our way into freedom or resisting to the very end, of accepting compromises which smacked of surrender or of adhering to the path of continuous struggle against imperialism became inescapable. I still remember strolling with Gandhiji one evening in the early forties and telling him how torn some of us felt between him and Jawaharlalji—"the heart" led us to him but the head to the latter and Gandhiji's smiling advice: "If I were you I would allow the head to be where the heart is!"

Inevitably there emerged, quite rapidly during the thirties and onwards groups of men and women (much younger than Jawaharlal Nehru) who came under the "Nehru spell", eager to think and act along lines indicated by him, echoing his thoughts, identifying themselves with him rather than any other individual. We were straightaway dubbed as "Nehruiques" by some who styled themselves Gandhians and complacently arrogated to themselves the role of true and virtuous disciples of the master! Mostly such people were chauvinist conservatives, who saw in the emergence of a band of younger men and women talking a different language, great danger to themselves. In reality neither Gandhiji nor Nehru did anything to consolidate either of the trends because it is my belief that they were essentially opposed to anything that smacked of sectarianism. Miles apart in many ways, the two were in absolute tune with one another and never encouraged any tendency that could lead to a clash in organizational terms. They agreed to differ when unable to arrive at a common understanding and were governed by a code of conduct unique among two leaders of such magnitude. Their own writings provide ample proof of the mutual regard, affection and comprehension, and despite the at-

tempt of radically-minded individuals who preferred to owe allegiance to him exclusively, Nehru discouraged any organized opposition to what was called the Gandhian approach. Nevertheless his impatience with those who vulgarized Gandhian values and boasted pretentiously of their moral superiority was equally vehement and devastating.

Nehru's reluctance to lead and unite his progressive colleagues who were by and large influenced by him into accepting socialism as a belief, was resented by many of them. It was quite inexplicable why he could not see the advantage in organizing the vast working masses and disciplining them for the attainment of a goal so near his heart's desire. And yet paradoxically when some of us took the initiative and went ahead and exerted our point of view demonstratively, we found him appreciative of our work. There are ever so many instances of his approval, but reminding over such a long stretch of time—nearly thirty-five years—it is difficult and almost impossible to record every encounter with Jawaharlal Nehru.

For me personally glimpses of him became more frequent after the main battle was over, for the simple reason that I happen to be a citizen of Delhi, which became his second home in post-independent India. My meetings with him were invariably in connection with incidents and events relating to social and political developments. As I have said, even though he played no direct part in providing day-to-day guidance to my activities, I always got the impression that not only did he hear me, patiently and indulgently, but I sensed sometimes in his silences and sometimes by the way he looked that he approved of my actions. We had many arguments and who can ever forget his indignant retorts, his frank exhibitions of annoyance when displeased and then that sudden far-away look, that calm gaze signifying partial acceptance of what was so hotly denied a few moments earlier. I shall never forget my amazement, and a sudden realization of myself as an entity of which he had become aware, when immediately on release from his last imprisonment in 1945 he sent me his greetings through the Press, not knowing where I was. The apprehension that I might not have been acting correctly in deciding for myself what tasks I should perform for four whole years of bitter struggle vanished and, I knew that he (as also Gandhiji) had not really disapproved



of our acts of revolt against imperialist Britain.

Similarly, when during the RIN mutiny he responded to my urgent appeal to him and cut short his holiday in Kashmir and came over to Bombay and heard what the brave young ratings had to say, I knew we had his support in sealing the final doom of British power in India. Again, when in the early fifties I had made up my mind to go abroad for study and told him of my intention to visit the Soviet Union and other socialist countries with a view to observe for myself how socialism operates he readily endorsed the plan. On my return when I reported to him (as was the wont of all who were near to him) my decision which amounted to a total break with the Congress, it never occurred to him to dissuade me from carrying out my plans. Nor did my subsequent efforts to make the working class and peasantry conscious of their role in working for a socialist society throw up any barriers between us. I could always be sure of a warm and affectionate welcome and sound advice. The final struggle for Goa's liberation was undertaken against heavy odds as we all know. Our efforts went on despite them and there were moments when he was made to believe that a military solution would invite world criticism. But Nehru knew that his tryst with destiny would remain incomplete if this tiny pocket symbolizing Portuguese aggression and barbarism was not liquidated. His sense of the historic prevailed and Salazar's forces were humbled and forced to withdraw. Again characteristically, although he had never given his formal approval to the campaign for Goa's liberation, yet when he realized that the demand for action was supported by every section of our people, he accepted the challenge.

How shall we cherish the memory of our trusted leader? Several ways and means will suggest themselves to each of us according to our understanding of the times we live in. What would he have in his country and his people do in his absence? He has left us enough words of wisdom to guide us individually till life's journey ends. Let us be true to them in remembrance and constantly reassure ourselves with his message that "only those can sense life who stand on the verge of it, only those whose lives are not governed by the fear of death....thus have we saved ourselves from triviality and an inner shame and cowardice".

*Link, May 30, 1965.*

## 8. Eighteen Years After Gandhiji

THE heart-breaking and unbelievable news that Gandhiji had been shot dead in New Delhi reached me in New York. I was to leave for India on the 29th of January but was delayed as all air journeys had to be cancelled due to bad weather. It was an uncommonly severe winter in North America and yet what froze every pore of one's being was not the icy winds or the chill from the snowstorm as it raged throughout the day, but the guilt of patriocide. Throughout the journey back a sense of shame, horror and disgust clung to me. To think that an Indian of our generation could have descended so low, could be so debased and monstrous like as to kill one against whom even the "leonine" British dared not raise their hand in violence was a nauseating, humiliating and degrading thought.

"What would the world think of us?" "How could we ever explain away this criminal act?" —were the questions uppermost in my mind as I sat huddled in my seat, not daring to look at anyone around. As a matter of fact I was told when I arrived at the London airport that Sir Stafford Cripps had already referred in sneering terms to the incapacity of free Indians to protect the man whom they professed to worship. Indeed, those were moments when it was difficult to look anyone in the face, so deep was the feeling that we had disgraced ourselves. Those who shared the agonising experience of Gandhiji's assassination were unable thereafter to recapture the elation that freedom had brought; our hour of triumph had been cut short and we shrank in our own estimation as a people. The martyrdom of Gandhiji, had it come about in the course of the struggle against imperialism, would have enabled us to share in it—but coming when it did, it only revealed the



ugliness beneath the surface of our boastful claims to a "spiritual" heritage.

I am asked very often why such men and women who were many years younger to Gandhiji and were very often critical of his religious and ethical approach to life should have clung to him in all essentials. I wish it were easy to give a satisfactory answer to this question because illogical as it might appear, those who most sharply disagreed with him were often his most disciplined disciples.

It was one of the peculiarities of the national response to Mahatma Gandhi that people of every class and almost all shades of radicalism were influenced by him and even if they differed from him on important issues they finally could not but fall in line with him when he launched his movements for the larger cause of freedom. No alternative paths were available to our generation which was politically most active from the early thirties to the late forties. There was nothing more acceptable to the masses of our people. The people were not prepared to support any movement that did not have his blessings. And, therefore, Jawaharlal Nehru was quite right when he wrote in reply to an armchair Marxist's attack on Gandhiji: "He functioned inevitably within the orbit of nationalist ideology, but the dominating passion that consumed him was a desire to raise the masses. In this respect he was always ahead of the nationalist movement.... Through nation-wide action he sought to mould the millions, and largely succeeded in doing so, and changing them from a demoralized, timid, and hopeless mass, bullied and crushed by every dominant interest, and incapable of resistance, into a people with self-respect and self-reliance, resisting tyranny, and capable of united action and sacrifice for a larger cause. He made them think of political and economic issues, and every village and every bazaar hummed with argument and debate on the new ideas and hopes that filled the people. That was an amazing psychological change".

Obviously, the most revolutionary ideology becomes meaningless if those who believe in it are unable to carry the masses with them, hence commonsense made us accept Gandhiji's advice and leadership.

Inevitably, therefore, during this period all roads led to Wardha or the Bhangi Colony or the III class compartment in which he

travelled or even to Birla House, because he was available to all from the highest to the lowest. His opponents, foreign and domestic, used to indulge in all manner of insinuation and aspersions for the very catholicity that drew people of all shades of opinion to him. For one who had set his heart on liberating not the country alone but the minds of men, such individuals who had doubt about the efficacy of his methods and were not in complete agreement with him, were specially welcome.

He was anxious to share his faith with them, to communicate his passionate beliefs because he realized that these people were sincerely and honestly (if somewhat impatiently) trying to test out ways and means which differed from his. Essentially a man of crystal like integrity he was always prepared to grant others the right to defend their beliefs. Gandhiji had another very rare capacity, namely, never to lose his poise or grow bitter and sour while arguing against points of view with which he was in total disagreement. Was this an attitude of mere tolerance? He denied it by saying, "Tolerance may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own...." What is more, he believed that "intolerance of criticism even of what one may prize as life itself, is not conducive to the growth of public corporate life". The criticism and views of friend or foe was not only acknowledged by Gandhiji but discussed in the columns of his weekly, *Harijan*.

When the Quit India movement went beyond the discipline enjoined by his non-violent non-cooperation, we were warned that he would disown and denounce us. Later when we explained at length how circumstances forced us to cross the limits, while he never agreed with us, instead of castigating us, he praised so warmly that our critics were completely confounded. At several prayer meetings after his release in 1944 he referred to "the Underground" and talked of their misguided methods but always qualified such statements by commending their fearlessness and courage. We all knew that he disapproved of secrecy and yet when I was eager and anxious to meet him secretly he never denied me that privilege. Sometimes when he wanted to communicate to some of us he would not hesitate to write and took good care to see that his letters reached their destination, wherever it was.

Gandhiji could have very easily ignored the 'rebel' group, but a study of his writings and speeches during the closing years of the



most exciting period of our history proves that we were very much in his thoughts, individually and collectively—always “the intimate friend and colleague”. His affectionate interest in our personal well-being and concern for our political future, even though we were not able to live up to his expectations proved how free he was from every form of bigotry, narrowness and sectarian prejudice.

It would be unfair to his revered memory if I were to give the impression that he encouraged dissent for the sake of dissent. On the contrary, he discouraged us from adhering to the view that violence was a necessary evil, never giving up the hope that some day those who resorted to insurrectionary methods would come to realize that the struggle for ushering in a new social order could be waged peacefully. He said; “if the whole nation of 34 million could be drilled so as to move together and if necessary die together as one man we should attain independence without striking a blow and set an example of a peaceful revolution for the whole world to emulate”.

It must be borne in mind that Gandhiji had necessarily to function on the nationalist plane and did not think in terms of class conflicts as such, but whatever he said or did stirred the masses to the depth of their being and made them aware of their class and caste subservience—the deep-rooted causes of their social backwardness as against the social prosperity of the privileged minority—and changed their attitude towards those who lived at their expense. In Jawaharlal Nehru's words, “Throughout his life he thought of India in terms of the poor and the oppressed and the downtrodden. To raise them and free them was the mission of his life. He adopted their ways of life and dress so that no one in the country might feel lowly”.

There were many who thought he made a fetish of simplicity and austerity. But the austerities he practised had nothing to do with religious asceticism. He wanted all of us in the movement, whatever our social status, to give up ostentatious habits so that we could evoke feelings of comradeship among all our fellow workers, who obviously could not afford the good things of life. I can recall ever so many occasions on which he argued (as with Sarojini Naidu) against the use of silk even if it was hand spun and woven, because he felt that the simpler our apparel, the more easily would

people be drawn into the struggle.

Thus, during the life-time of this epoch-making person—the subtlest Indian of our age—even we who were no more than mere specks were given opportunities to work under his direction. This gave us a tremendous measure of self-confidence, a belief that our inadequacies notwithstanding we could be instrumental in bringing about historic changes.

With his passing away went much of the reflected glory in which we revelled. But the memory of having lived and worked for the liberation of India under “this mighty person” can never fade.

*Link, January 30, 1966.*



and read of vague happenings in those stirring times from their elders but the story of the courage and sacrifice of the millions who suffered and perished has scarcely affected their thinking.

Mechanically imparted anecdotes and incidents, cursory references to our great patriots and savants and the efforts of Jawaharlal Nehru constantly to educate the people notwithstanding, the post-freedom generation has not been given a thorough and systematic understanding of the politics and ethics of the Indian revolution in its entirety. Therefore, if the new generation takes it for granted that the free air they breathe and the opportunities they enjoy today, did not involve a revolutionary effort, they are not really to blame. The tradition to which they are heir has been different because the intellectual norms that have shaped their thinking have ignored by and large the historical setting in which India's Independence was achieved.

The stimulating idealism that invigorated several generations of Indians in the earlier and later British periods of our history, has been replaced by a peculiar amalgam of opportunism, revolutionary catchwords, phrase-mongering and a cynical disregard of basic values. Gandhiji's assassination typified the emergence of this amoral, socially callous and unethical trend in our social organism. After that tragedy Jawaharlal Nehru's single-handed efforts to keep the old fires burning in our hearts and minds were inadequate because the organisational form available to him failed to deliver the goods. Why was it that even leaders of Gandhiji's and Nehru's calibre could not purify and ennoble us after Independence became an established fact? Apparently our colonially conditioned nature is so mean and tawdry that no individual by himself can arrest its corroding influence. As the fruits of freedom ripened, the lust for power and property and the affluent way of life swept out with every passing year nearly every vestige of the former desire to sublimate our urges to work for the common good and for commonly held goals.

These harsh words are widely applicable but more so to such of us who in one form or another were participants in the movement for national independence. Most of us seem to have succumbed to the temptation to take to easy work and live in soft surroundings mainly because — be it the Gandhians or Harijan Sevaks, the Kasturbaitees or Bharat Sevaks, progressive authors, artists or

## 9. The New Challenge

*"We end today a period of ill-fortune and India discovers herself again.... The achievement we celebrate today is but a step—an opening of opportunity to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?"*

—From Jawaharlal Nehru's speech to the Constituent Assembly on August 14, 1947.

OLD memories can achieve new meanings on anniversaries, which are formalised and institutionalised efforts to recall significant events in a nation's history. It has become a custom with us to observe every year the birth of freedom from colonial rule in the month of August. But this month is important not only because it saw, nineteen years ago, the end of British rule over India, but also because five years prior to it in 1942, it was on the 9th of August that the people of this country rose, in vast numbers, resisting with all their strength, organized and unorganized, the will and authority of the then invincible empire of Great Britain.

In the twenty odd years that have intervened since that mighty upsurge shook us out of our slavishness and torpor, a new generation has come into existence. This generation's knowledge and experience of life has been conditioned by a chain of circumstances entirely different from those of my own generation. They have learnt to look upon the 15th August as the day of Indian Independence, as the day of our deliverance from foreign bondage; but awareness of the long and grim struggle that preceded it and contributed to make freedom a living reality has never really been a part of the young Indian's consciousness. They may have heard



journalists—we have all arrived at the escapist conclusion that patchy social reform is all that is possible and not social revolution.

When people at the helm of social, cultural and political affairs reach the end of their mental tether, moral exhaustion is inevitable and becomes a noticeable feature of the times. Therefore, when appeals for sacrifice and hard work are sent forth from ministerial or from other elevated levels in the present Establishment, the response is one of indifference and irreverent rejection. Young men and women do come forward but only to ask for jobs and jeeps and all the bureaucratic paraphernalia that has sprung around "social work". They refuse to go to the people living in villages and city slums unless they are provided with everything that our MPs and MLAs, our Ministers and our business executives, are equipped with, maybe with some modification. A slightly older age group expects to be equated with candidates for either Municipal, State or Parliamentary bodies!

Why did the Do or Die call of Quit India days evoke quite a different set of reactions? Those who enlisted wanted to plunge into the struggles, wanted to know about their form and content and they were completely unafraid of the consequences. Facing lathis and bullets or being led to prisons and even the gallows, nothing mattered to them in those years of feverish fervour.

The moral timbre of the leadership at that period as also the objective situation in which it functioned was vastly different from what it is 24 years later. The manner in which post-independence social and political developments have taken place has divided our peoples sharply because the gains and losses of this period are not shared equally. These divisions into classes and categories, some with too much and others too little (and some with just enough in between) explain the divisive processes at work, resulting in a bewildering variety of groups in almost every articulate section of the people. Those who have gained name and fame and wealth in the present order are unable to see why they who live by the sweat of their labour alone, should agitate and not submit and accept the current load of hardships in a spirit of resignation.

Aspirants to political leadership in the near future are being warned well ahead of the general elections next year that when

making promises they must take care that they are fulfilled. August 1942 saw the beginning of the end of British rule in India. Is August 1966 witnessing the emergence of forces which will insist on placing social liberation on the agenda? The disinherited millions were willing to wait patiently all these 19 years because they loved and trusted Jawaharlal Nehru, their friend and guide of many many years. True, he could not keep his promises but they knew that he meant to do so some day. Their faith and belief, their admiration and adoration, knew no bounds because he also loved them and lived, worked and died for them. Had he the additional good fortune of galvanizing into action men and women who sincerely believed in his socialist faith, his revolutionary world outlook, his anti-imperialism and passion for world peace, he might have witnessed in his lifetime itself the birth of the new civilization to which he referred in his presidential address at Lucknow in 1936: "I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in Socialism, and when I use this word I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense. Socialism is, however, something even more than an economic doctrine; it is a philosophy of life and as such also it appeals to me. I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation, and the subjection of the Indian people except through Socialism... Some glimpses we can have of this new civilization in the territories of the USSR. I look upon that great and fascinating unfolding of a new order and a new civilization as the most promising feature of our dismal age. If the future is full of hope it is largely because of Soviet Russia and what it has done, and I am convinced that, if some world catastrophe does not intervene, this new civilization will spread to other lands and put an end to the wars and conflicts which capitalism feeds. I do not know how or when this new order will come to India. I imagine that every country will fashion it after its own way and fit it in with its national genius. But the essential basis of that order must remain and be a link in the world order that will emerge out of the present chaos". He did not live to see all this and there is no knowing yet when this dream will materialise but it is good to know that the outlines of the goal are clear and categorical.

The progressive forces in our country will have to reckon with the fact that an ex-colonial economy cannot be released from its



feudal and semi-feudal heritage in a matter of days. Tall talk of militant programmes and action will not change the hard facts of life. The formidable task of solving the individual problems of nearly 500 million men and women has to be approached seriously and patiently. If a "national consensus" is essential in any socio-political sphere, it is imperative for the winning of economic independence. Every ounce of our national energy should have been devoted to overcoming the humiliating spectacle of poverty and the evils it has bred. Then only could the successive five-year plans and their achievements have provided a more solid base for our independent development. Their failure lies in the fact that despite the development that has undeniably taken place in the 10 years of political independence, India finds it necessary to knock at the door of every developed country for aid and assistance.

The present-day talk of reviving the 'Swadeshi spirit' is a pathetic admission of independent India's dependence on foreign props and crutches. Can such a national consensus for rebuilding the economy be brought about in our system of multiparty parliamentary democracy? During the aggressive assaults and attacks of 1962 and 1965 there was a near-unanimity for the defence of the motherland. Then surely the realisation that unless we win the battle against economic backwardness our existing freedom might vanish should bring about the unity of all our patriotic and progressive elements. The crisis of poverty can be overcome by resolving the crisis of leadership.

We in India have need to hasten the pace of our development before a new and disastrous war once again destroys world peace. The death-defying bravery of our fellow Asians in Vietnam against American imperialists can at any moment provoke the latter into waging a nuclear war. It is our international and continental duty to prevent this world catastrophe. These are tasks that can unite us as a people once again, even as we were united long ago before Independence and restore in a large measure our confidence to think and act as free people.

As the nineteenth year of Independence draws to its end, there is a new tenseness in the atmosphere. While the clash of ideas, factions and personalities is reaching new heights, the people's opposition to unpopular decisions and their ever-increasing burdens is bringing them into conflict with authority in almost every

part of the country. This ferment is to be welcomed if it results in unleashing fresh and hitherto unused energies of the people for completing the revolutionary process. There is so much to be done here at home and abroad and so few to do the work that the need for young and talented men and women with a vision and a mission (who will replace the faded and the tired ones), was never more urgent than today.

However, as the hour of electoral decision approaches, every political party will need to look for places for its representatives in the various organs of power. The peasant and the worker have not yet become politically articulate and prefer to be represented by those who they think are better equipped to deal with their problems. But this shyness must go and they must step out of their seclusion and participate in the task of leading and running the nation. Socialism in its most fundamental sense will elude us if the producers of wealth continue to "rule" by proxy. Whatever the obstacles, be it the British-patterned ways and methods of law-making, or the highly complicated Whitehall-oriented administrative machine, they must brush them aside and take their full share in administering the country, because they constitute the overwhelming majority. The present order is reaching the evening of its day, let new classes and their new leaders begin India's tomorrow.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1966.



to preserve these conditions as attractions for exciting the jaded nerves and satiated appetites of foreign tourists? Or is it time we put a stop to these obscenities by enacting measures that will help us to clean up the city and its environments?

Members of the Metropolitan Council and those who occupy its executive offices can, if they so desire, bring about a sea-change in the affairs of Delhi because they know why it is so unkempt and how the people who live here are suffering. They have neglected Delhi for a variety of reasons, but there is a fresh opportunity for Delhi's politicians to bury past differences (personal and factional) and work for the welfare of Delhi's teeming thousands. To be effective, Delhi's leaders must draw up a list of priorities and implement decisions by exercising tact and patience. The administrative personnel and the people can be brought into a more harmonious relationship if those who are at the helm of affairs want to serve the former and not merely score debating points.

Delhi should be the pride of the Indian people. With the introduction of these reforms it should be easier henceforth to work towards this goal.

*Link*, October 9, 1966.

## 10. Delhi As A Symbol

MODERN Delhi has risen on the ruins of many an empire. Its ancient monuments bear testimony to the important role this city has played over the centuries. They lie scattered all over and if only stones could speak we could hear them tell the story of our forefathers, depicting life as it was lived in their time. They would be stories of storm and struggle, of war and peace, of conquest and submission, fascinating and rich. These silent monuments appear to watch the new city and its people with scorn because they feel outraged at the vulgarity of Delhi's present-day architecture and the crudeness of our hybridised culture.

Nevertheless, time cannot stand still and the cultural monstrosity that is Delhi today will sooner or later reflect the refinements that the new age of industrial growth, science and abundance will bring. The emergence of a new administrative structure for Delhi has roused a great deal of interest. Will it give birth to a modern and egalitarian Capital? Since every national metropolis mirrors the level of a country's social, political and economic development, as things are, Delhi's street scenes are typical of an India in transition. The bullock cart and the limousine, asphalted thoroughfares with bright lights and narrow unlit streets. Cows and buffaloes roaming alongside horse-driven tongas and the latest in scooters. It is indeed a baffling spectacle.

Sophisticated tourists from countries which have swept away these relics of pre-industrial order, are naturally thrilled at the exoticness of it all. As a matter of fact, they get their money's worth only when they can photograph an Indian street scene, its temples and mosques, with urchins, lepers and women begging and imploring them for no more than a small coin. But do we wish



failed to achieve nothing very much more than a superficial transformation of our social and economic conditions. However, an immediate explanation of its inability to create conditions that could eliminate the accumulated obstacles and the country's inability to take rapid strides on the road to progress is essential. Therefore, some rough and ready conclusions should be attempted even though they are not the result of a profound study of the period immediately preceding independence.

In its essentials we must admit that the Indian anti-imperialist struggle was from its inception more protestant than revolutionary. Even after the Indian National Congress had ceased to be the mildly liberal organisation it was in its earliest days, the Gandhian Congress at its most militant periods refused to permit the anti-British movement to go beyond the framework of civil disobedience. What is more, it refused to encourage or support any anti-feudal or working class uprisings lest they lead to violent armed struggles. We can recall ever so many instances when the anti-imperialist mood and temper of the masses was diverted into channels of passive resistance of a demonstrative character and their urge for militant action contained within the limits of non-violence and *satyagraha*. Whenever there arose a possibility (as in the 20s, 30s and 40s) of insurrectionary and revolutionary struggles that might have at one sweep weakened if not destroyed both foreign and Indian vested interests, Gandhiji's anguished appeals not to go beyond the limits of non-violence acted as a devastating veto. There are numerous instances of national leaders disowning and denouncing those who resorted to armed resistance or advocated guerilla methods against the British ruling force.

As a matter of fact it is worth debating whether the Congress-led freedom movement would have been in a position to compel Britain's withdrawal in 1947, had its imperial strength not been undermined by the Second World War. Repeated nonviolent civil resistance movements had failed to paralyse Britain's civil and military administration. It was because of the destruction and demoralisation after World War II in England that the Congress gained an advantage over its adversary. The fact that independence was wrested not on India's terms (of a united India) and that we had to compromise on the issue of partition, supports the contention that we were forced to bargain from a position of com-

## 11. Will the Congress Survive?

THE shadow of a momentous event has enveloped the Indian landscape. Once again the hour approaches when a sixth of the human race will be expected to exercise its constitutional right to delegate its political authority to known and unknown individuals. With every passing day excitement is increasing because those engaged in the electoral battle are doing their best to stimulate the peoples' interest in the coming contest.

Sitting in hamlets or huts, in mansions or living in their world of slums and tenements, countless men and women are engaged in the fascinating process of making up their minds. Although they live in different and mutually exclusive compartments there is a commonly-felt awareness that the general election next month will be more significant than the preceding ones. The mere absence of Nehru, who piloted India's ship of State for 17 long years, has invested the situation with a peculiar gravity. In spite of their disappointments and doubts in the closing years of the Nehru era, they had that indefinable thing called "faith" in his dedicated leadership, which gave them a feeling of security and confidence. Without him not only has the present centre of authority ceased to inspire respect but it is widely believed that those who rule today do not have the ability to meet the dangers and difficulties facing the country.

In this atmosphere of doubt, despair and cynicism a drift towards a directionless order of things has begun. The baffling confusion of the pre-election scene are no more than a reflection of our rudderless existence.

Future analysts of the history of our time will be in a better position to reveal as to why the Congress after the British had quit,



parative weakness and not from a position of strength.

On the other hand it is my personal belief that had a truly revolutionary process with organisational roots among the peasantry, proletariat and the middle class continued to challenge British rule over a longer period, it would inevitably have united the people irrespective of their religion, caste and community and dealt a crushing blow not only to imperialism but its allies and friends here. But this was not to be for the simple reason that while the Congress was primarily committed to free India from foreign bondage, it was not prepared to be a party to bringing about conditions in which a radical change in property and social relations would be inevitable. Therefore, had the mass revolt against British rule not been inhibited by the appeals to limit its scope it would have not only put an end to imperialism but brought about the demolition of the entire social structure on which it rested. The refusal of the Congress to be a party to any such movement, in fact its active opposition to such national trends, should have warned us as to its future role in Indian politics. Such speculations are, as a rule, brushed aside as futile—the usual “ifs” of history—but they do help us to understand even if to a limited extent, the currents and cross currents in which we seem to be caught up. Thus the political student of these times should consider whether there was any justification for the widespread belief that the Congress was destined to lead both the forces of national and social liberation, whether its successes and failures should be measured by yardsticks one applies to political parties composed of men and women with firm socialist convictions and bound together by a code of strict party discipline.

Besides, for one who has lived and worked under the banner of the Congress in pre-Independent India there need be no illusions as to its ideological content and social composition. We know of course that there were the pulls and pressures to the right and left of its main driving force, Gandhiji. But the power politicians among Congressmen even in the pre-independence days never felt the need to be guided by well-defined principles, and their thinking was either rightist or reactionary. However, there were always a few Congressmen eagerly in search of new concepts and patterns of behaviour and they used to be drawn either to Gandhiji or to Jawaharlal Nehru.

Gandhiji's dream of a people who would be simple in their needs, self-reliant and self-sufficient was in sharp contrast to Nehru's vision of a socialist and industrialised order, wherein material incentives for a higher living standard would not be discouraged. The former abhorred the thought of violent class struggles and the latter accepted the theory at any rate, of its inevitability, if parliamentary methods failed. The impact of their public debate and loud thinking acted as a phenomenal stimulant for the masses and the intelligentsia. Through the speeches and writings of Nehru and the prayer meeting utterances of Gandhiji the Congress acquired its aura of high idealism. And yet it would be incorrect to conclude that the moral precepts of Gandhian utopia or Nehru's socialism were sincerely accepted by the Congress leadership. The Congress organisation as such never cared to inculcate these ideals among its followers. Because of this indifference Gandhiji and Nehru became their own torch bearers, carrying their message in person to the vast assemblages they addressed. And since they had totally identified themselves with the Congress the people in general assumed that these objectives and ideals were accepted by the Congress as a matter of faith or conviction.

With the passing away of Gandhiji and now of Nehru a process of disillusionment has set in because governments led by the Congress have failed to implement even the elementary social and economic reforms they had promised over and over again. The untried moral prestige enjoyed by the Congress has withered away entirely due to its cynical disregard for putting into practice what it preaches. Thus the Congress brand of socialism is looked upon as a sickening amalgam of political opportunism and ideological hypocrisy meant only to retain mass loyalty for the purpose of securing its political suffrage. Seldom has the socialist concept and principle been debased by misuse as in India since 1947. In its eagerness to hold on to political power and privilege the Congress has abdicated its earlier role and can no longer carry on the fight against oppression and human misery.

Between the vast multitude of men and women who long for relief from poverty, drudgery and drabness and the handful of Indians who have exploited every opportunity to enrich themselves, there are as yet insurmountable barriers. Having consciously served the affluent and prosperous classes of this country so faith-



fully, it should cease talking of guarding Jawaharlal Nehru's legacy of socialism or of completing his unfinished tasks. It should stop repeating the formula ad nauseum that the Congress alone can be the nation's vehicle for strengthening freedom and democracy, for abolishing social inequalities and injustice because it convinces none. If belief in its political integrity is not to be shattered completely the least it can do is not to confuse and confound public opinion.

The Indian National Congress, Gandhiji said in the closing years of his life, derived its strength from the people. If it betrayed them, they would fall a prey to the white-robed 'goondas' of society. He was disturbed and perturbed by events not in tune with his understanding of political uprightness. "A living organism", he said, "ever grows or it dies". The Congress has won political freedom, but it has yet to win economic freedom, social and moral freedom. These freedoms are harder than the political, if only because they are constructive, less exciting and not spectacular. All embracing constructive work evokes the energy of all the units of the millions.

"The Congress has got the preliminary and necessary part of her freedom. The hardest has yet to come. In its difficult ascent to democracy, it has inevitably created rotten boroughs, leading to corruption and creation of institutions, popular and democratic only in name. How to get out of the weedy and unwieldy growth?"

His advice that the Congress should disband itself because "as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine it has outlived its use" was ignored and caused much eyebrow raising. But mindful of the opposition in high places he drafted a resolution which he would have placed before the AICC had he lived. It gave a complete blue print of a new organisation—Lok Sevak Sangh—which would replace the Congress and become the spearhead of a movement "to attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of India's 70,000 villages". None among his erstwhile devotees cared to give his suggestion a second thought.

Of late several Congressmen with socialist convictions have begun to entertain serious doubts and wonder whether the Congress has the capacity any more to enthuse and rouse the masses. This is because the antisocialists within it have acquired positions of influence and are able to dictate terms to their vacillating col-

leagues. If the socialists are unable to re-vitalise the Congress by drawing into its fold the working people from fields and factories in large numbers and thereby change its structure and composition base upwards, the Congress will continue to be the tool of post-independent India's affluent classes. It can of course wield power on behalf of the latter for some time but by doing so it will have betrayed the legacy it inherited irrevocably. To save it from this sad fate the task of ousting antisocialists from the Congress organisation has to be given high priority. It has failed so far because the effort lacked a dynamic leadership. Nor was the search for this leadership within the Congress undertaken seriously.

So what of the future? Let me repeat that if the Congress is to survive, it can do so only as a force that is willing to lead the march towards the goal of a socialist state. If there are Congressmen who believe that it is possible then they have to undertake the herculean task of bringing about elemental changes within the organisation. With faith in themselves and their cause they can and should make a final effort. Otherwise the angry waves of India's desperate millions will engulf it.

*Link*, January 26, 1967.



the consequence of their action lay in the fact that they were part of the prevailing world turmoil. Dramatic developments associated with the rise of the Hitler menace in Europe in the thirties of this century had created tensions in every part of the world. When they culminated in war on a global scale involving Britain and its allies, it affected every section of the politically conscious India.

The Congress had declared again and again that India would not be a party to Britain's war for "colonies, raw materials and markets" and that in no case would we allow our manpower and resources to be used against our will. Therefore, a clash with the British, who were determined not to yield, seemed imminent and inevitable in the eyes of most people as the war progressed. But would the Congress fight? Was Gandhiji prepared to risk a struggle that might not remain peaceful? Doubts had arisen not only about Gandhiji's willingness to challenge the British in their hour of distress but about his technique and their effectiveness for dislodging the British army of occupation. The machinations of imperialist bureaucrats and their henchmen, it was felt, had to be matched by superior and skillfully organised forces. The non-violent non-cooperation movements in spite of Gandhiji's magnificent leadership having failed to shake the mighty British empire, there was much excited speculation about the necessity for resorting to armed struggle.

Before the outbreak of World War II, Britain's invincibility was taken for granted in India and people had come to believe that freedom was a distant, almost unattainable goal. Gandhiji's noble efforts and Jawaharlal Nehru's inspiring guidance notwithstanding, they had come to the conclusion that we were the victims of an enormously superior military and industrial world power which required for its overthrow equally enormous resources. The fact that an alien people from a distant and a tiny island had the capacity to subjugate the million in a country as vast as ours (and continued to do so for nearly a century and a half), had engendered feelings of intense hatred for it. It was also becoming obvious that we Indians, however glorious our past, were unable to throw out this foreign usurper. Therefore, it was but natural that when the European crisis exploded and war on a world scale began, the reaction of the Indian people to this catastrophe was one of unconcealed relief!

## 12. Looking Back

*"I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should, in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour."*

—MAHATMA GANDHI

*"It was better to jump into the uncharted seas of action and do something rather than be the tame objects of a malign fate."*

—JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

A QUARTER of a century has rolled by and the period of storms and upheavals known as "the Fortytwo" the "9th August" or the "Quit India" Movement, belongs to a past that is becoming shadowy and remote with every passing year. Those years from 1942 to 1946 belong to a heroic phase of our history. Though to those who lived through it or took part in its activities it was chiefly a period of romantic adventures and legendary acts of courage and daring, it nevertheless represented a period of revolutionary mass awakening unprecedented in recent history. Thwarted and humiliated, unarmed and unprepared, the working and middle classes both in the towns and the villages countered with all their pent-up fury the savage and planned attacks unleashed by Englishmen who had been instructed by Churchill to crush such Indians as dared talk of freedom.

But it was not merely this brutal violence that made the mass revolt of '42 incomparable and so different from earlier uprisings. The reason why, for several weeks, large numbers of men and women desired to brave all hazards with reckless indifference to



A weakened empire would have to loosen its grip and this realisation was enough to lift us out of the mire of defeatism and apathy. This did not, of course, apply to the intellectual elite in the Congress and the Communist parties. For Jawaharlal Nehru, especially, it was a cruel dilemma. While he could not reconcile himself to the role of a helpless spectator by refusing to respond to the peoples' demand for swift action he found it difficult to say or do anything that might help the fascists in their plans of global conquest. He pleaded eloquently, mainly through his writings and the resolutions of the Congress Working Committee, to the British Government and allied powers to make a declaration of their "way aims" so as to enable Indians to join as equal partners in the common struggle against fascist tyranny. His arguments and entreaties were spurned.

Churchill's arrogant rejection of the Congress demand for a National Government, the Cripps Mission's empty gestures and ultimate failure even when the invasion of India by the Axis Powers was regarded as a certainty, angered and alienated Indian opinion throughout the country. Gandhiji sensed this and his speeches and writings of this period reflected the nation's mood and temper; his celebrated "Do or Die" message to the nation, appeared first in the columns of the *Harijan* and his hints about the inevitability of an "open rebellion" electrified the political climate of the country.

The passion for action mounted hourly, because it was felt by all patriotic Indians that the time for making a final bid had come and that history might never offer such a favourable opportunity again. The Congress realised that if it did not respond to the burning desire in the hearts of millions for revolutionary action against British rule, the people would discover other channels and form alternative organisations for channelising their determination to fight for liberty.

Influential sections of the Congress leadership understood all this and despite their reluctance to come into open conflict with the British, as was usual with them, left it to Gandhiji to find a way out. While Jawaharlal Nehru's hesitation was entirely due to the fact that he was vehemently opposed to Nazism and its allies and did not want its hordes to reap any advantage from India's struggle against British imperialism, a majority of his colleagues

on the Congress Working Committee were motivated by varying shades of 'pragmatic' considerations.

Gandhiji, however, had made up his mind that to overcome British blindness and obduracy the people would have to go into action for their country's liberation, because soft-worded admonitions and appeals to the British ruling authorities to mend their ways had met with no response. But even after he had come to this decision Gandhiji wanted a final opportunity to arrive at an honourable settlement because according to his philosophy of non-violence it was unethical to embarrass one's opponent at a time when he was fighting for his very survival! The British authorities in India had no such inhibitions, they on the contrary were terrified at the possibility of being balked in their designs for suppressing the people.

They were afraid that the Gandhian techniques of persuading Whitehall might after all succeed, and a modified version of the Cripps plan result in the formation of a National Government at the Centre. Therefore, without any warning mass arrests were made overnight and the entire organisation of the Indian National Congress was paralysed. Ruthless and ferocious repression being the normal routine of imperialist governments when called to quell a mass rebellion, many acts of barbarity were committed from August 9, 1942 when the Quit India Movement began till almost the eve of British withdrawal from India.

But the Viceroy and his Government were obviously not prepared for the manner in which the people took up the challenge. The people, specially the youth, in their blind fury were determined to paralyse, harass, destroy and obstruct the Government's capacity to carry out the administration. Immediately after August 9 in many parts of the country groups of patriotic men and women went "underground"! These developments unnerved the Government and it began to be haunted by the thought that instead of tamely going to jail the leaders of this spontaneous movement would organise a regular guerilla form of struggle.

What happened for weeks on end was that the "underground" leadership did without hesitation retaliate by sanctioning sabotage and such other forms of harassment as an unarmed and unprepared people were capable of. Whether it was due to Subhas Chandra Bose's broadcasts from Berlin or the literature and prop-



aganda of Partisan Resistance groups in Nazi occupied Europe, the urge to resort to armed insurrectionary action was widespread among patriots of the younger generation.

Satyagraha, the classic weapon in the Gandhian armoury, ceased to be the only form of resistance. There had not been any organised preparation. Nor was there an experienced leadership for the new way of struggle; but a whole generation of brave young Indians fought magnificently. The British Government though taken aback initially unleashed reprisals with all the brutality it was capable of. Such statistics as are available prove that thousands perished and many more were imprisoned and tortured for committing acts of political sabotage, even adopting scorched earth tactics and for distributing treasonous literature.

The 42 "underground" was both a myth and a reality. It was a myth because after the first upsurge subsided it was not able to create a network of active units with adequate resources for carrying on the struggle—according to a well defined insurrectionary programme. It was a reality because despite these limitations it provided a nucleus of persons who by virtue of their earlier record of work in the freedom movements of the thirties and having been declared outlaws (with a handsome price on each of their heads) acquired phenomenal popularity. They inspired the belief that a "centre" however insubstantial had emerged, to which one could turn for guidance and assistance for carrying on the Quit India struggle. And up to a point the "underground" did perform these tasks although whatever it attempted to do would have been impossible were it not for the willing cooperation it received from hundreds of people of all classes. In all surreptitious and insurrectionary movements "the significant few" have to depend on many a silent and self-effacing individual for their personal safety and collective effectiveness.

That this movement gradually weakened and died out was not strange. Apart from lack of capacity to inspire the masses and make it a country-wide expression of the determination to throw the British out physically, there were ideological and political reasons. Even in the first few months of struggle, conflicts developed within the underground leadership itself and internal differences became sharp. The Gandhian wing disapproved of what smacked of violence and approached Gandhiji to condemn what the un-

Gandhian elements were attempting. The "militant Augusters" evolved their own code of conduct for the struggle and maintained that since they had issued no instructions to kill Englishmen they were not violating the essentials of non-violence!

However, the Gandhians were bent upon dissociating and denouncing these leaders for "deviations". They expressed their conformity to the principles of non-violence by going to jail after "surrendering" to the authorities. As the years dragged on defiance of British authority became purely symbolic but the inner core of the "underground" insisted on carrying on the struggle and was dissuaded by their followers from disbanding themselves voluntarily. India's version of the underground resistance was vastly different from the European because it could not become more than symbolic. In the absence of a revolutionary tradition on the classical pattern, we were unprepared mentally and ill-equipped for effective action. Unarmed and untrained we failed to seize authority on a wide scale. The territories of Balia, Satara and Midnapore were isolated instances of parallel rebel administration and even there we could not hold out beyond a few weeks.

Had the underground movement struck roots and emerged as a militant organisation of young cadres trained to carry on armed struggle it could have influenced the course of political events in the country when with the end of the World War II the scene in India changed. But while its leaders enjoyed immense mass popularity the fact that they were not backed by an organised political force made them inadequate. Otherwise a mighty movement could have been commenced against the partitioning of India and the series of concessions which the British extracted before departing. It is one of the ironies of our situation that those who participated in the '42 struggle had to submit to the leadership of men and women who had only heard of it from behind prison bars.

The bravery and superb courage displayed by at least a million individuals during the long reign of British terror will in all probability never find an adequate place in the history of our freedom struggle, because their deeds of heroism were spontaneous and not meant for recognition and reward. The unknown martyrs whether they perished in the concentration camps of Europe or were flogged and sent to the gallows by the British in India, were the truest of true human beings. Their martyrdom was meant to



freedom from fear, war and want all over the world. In actual reality, however, neither war nor hunger has been outlawed. The Indian man bombing and killing in Vietnam, the suppression of Negroes in America by racial gangsters, the Arab refugees fleeing in fear of Israeli terror and the hungry million of India's workers and peasants—there are the memorials posterity has raised to honour the world's martyrs !

*Link, August 15, 1967.*

### 13. Republic and the People

The thoughts and feelings of educated Indians on this 19th anniversary of India's proclamation of a Republican form of Government vary from class to class, region to region, village to town. Although they all belong to the educated class they have very little in common. And between this class and the rest of their fellow-men are barriers that keep them apart.

The Constitution the people are said to have given themselves had hardly anything to do with the adult millions of our country in 1948. The overwhelming majority were as remote from the proceedings of the constituent Assembly which hammered out the Indian Constitution as today's man-made satellites are from the whirling stars.

The lawyer-leaders of the Congress of those days from Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel downwards were entirely committed to accept the British Parliamentary system in all its essentials as the ideal structure for interpreting democracy. It never occurred to them that its evolution in Britain was conditioned by circumstances—social, economic and political—very different from ours. Nor were they aware of the fact that to the vast sea of Indian humanity, writhing in poverty and living in complete ignorance of the modern age, democracy of the British variety could never mean a living reality.

Although Jawaharlal Nehru often said that while all that belonged to the past should not be worshipped, and that it would not do to develop a contempt for it either, the pattern of democracy enshrined in the Constitution had no roots in any of our traditional political concepts. Despite his assertion that "new patterns must inevitably be adopted but they must be integrated with the



old", he yielded on all major issues completely to those whose thought-process and values were wholly West European.

Thus political leaders and legal luminaries of every group and party worked zealously under his personal guidance to adopt a Constitution that among other things guaranteed the right of ownership of the means of production and made sacrosanct the privileges and opportunities of those who had acquired feudal and capitalist property under the British. Contrarily, all that the vast body of unlettered, emaciated and disinherited peasants and workers and other wage-earners got was the right to vote, the right to voice their protest. They were expected to be satisfied with the thought of having obtained equality under the laws of the land.

Although, constitutionally, they were the "masters" who had the right to vote representatives in or out of power, economically, socially or culturally, the Constitution had no built-in safeguards for the toiling sons and daughters of our soil. This legal equality which was so magnanimously conferred on the dispossessed millions has caused a great deal of satisfaction to liberals, radicals and all those who swear by formal democracy. The fact that during the last 19 years our people have performed their electoral duties peacefully and intelligently earned them a patronising certificate. Their maturity and good sense were appreciated so long as they chose to be represented by men who upheld the rights of the property-owning classes and their satellites. But now that they are turning away from traditional leaders and electing such people as want to bring about a socio-economic and cultural revolution, the respectable custodians of law and order are already challenging the Constitution and raising doubts about the sanctity of democratic rights, ridiculing the new entrants to Parliament and State legislatures for their "boorish" and "undignified" behaviour and obstructing their right to form lawfully constituted governments.

The prosperous and educated elite who have functioned as guardians of the social and economic order created by the British had taken it for granted that the dumb millions would remain subservient for all time. The post-British order made it possible for this new class to capture all the opportunities that a person requires to live fully and they naturally grabbed them as all accidental beneficiaries do. They were fairly confident that despite the

loud talk about social justice and Nehru's constant campaign for adhering in an egalitarian order, their own living standards would never be disturbed. Droughts, floods, conflicts, and political upheavals which cause acute shortages and therefore bring distress to the generality of people, they believed, would not affect their creature comforts or prevent them from prospering.

The anti-imperialist national revolution in India was so entirely dependent on the upper-class and upper-caste nationalist leadership that the new ruling class came to dominate the scene with amazing promptness and force. It acquired all the commanding heights earlier held by the British and suppressed the truly revolutionary forces with the aid of its newly won instruments of State power. Highly intelligent, tolerably well-informed and intensely ambitious, the new ruling class achieved a great deal for itself and was justifiably proud of its performance. It took to concepts like technology, planning and specialised knowledge and applied them to further its aim of industrial development, patterned naturally on the Anglo-American model. And for some time it succeeded in presenting a picture of advancement, progress, stability and growth.

Why then, with the passing away of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, has this confidence given place to a general and widespread feeling of mounting despair, a haunting fear that the process of orderly development has been arrested and that politically India has entered a period of chaotic confusion? All manner of analyses are being attempted and experts and specialists who have the requisite capacity to discover the deep-seated roots of a particular social situation are busily engaged in indentifying the cause or a multiplicity of causes. Long ago, Nehru with characteristic farsightedness wrote: "Our major difficulties in India are due to the fact that we consider our problems—economic, social, industrial, agricultural, communal, Indian States—within the framework of existing conditions. Within that framework, and retaining the privileges and special status that are part of it they become impossible of solution. Even if some patchwork solution is arrived at under stress of circumstances, it does not and cannot last. The old problems continue and new problems, or new aspects of old problems, are added to them. This approach of ours is partly due to tradition



and old habit, but essentially it is caused by the steel-frame of the British Government which holds together the ramshackle structure."

True, the steel-frame he referred to is manned by Indians now and the men and women who are governing the country are elected by none other than the Indian people themselves. But a mere replacement of personnel never leads to solutions that can bring true liberation. It is precisely because the leadership has not been able to smash the old framework and replace it with one that could solve the people's problems by satisfying their new social needs, that there is no unity of purpose and action, at the administrative level.

If we have lost the sense of wholeness, in recent years, if we are unable to assume collective responsibility for the well-being of every stratum, every section of our people, it is because the leadership in post-independent India was split on practically every issue of national importance and social significance.

Having realised that India's new rulers were not serious about implementing their promises of upsetting the old acquisitive society based essentially on the principle of exploitation of man by man, a new mood has come upon the masses; they are not prepared to trust those who have broken their pledges. Individual freedom, civil liberties, etc., have little meaning for them because the parliamentary system of democracy has bred a new class of exploiters who have all the advantages while the toiling sons of the soil have to struggle for their right to work, for a proper wage, and are denied even the minimum necessities to satisfy their basic needs. In every calamity, natural or engineered by profiteers and blackmarketeers it is the working population that has to bear the brunt.

Dissatisfied and sullen, the working class of this country, demand equality not merely in law but in fact because they want to live as dignified self-reliant people. They want opportunities for releasing their creative energies and talent. In short they want to be masters of their destiny and not slaves of vested interests. The monopoly of the rich, they believe, can be broken because this has happened in countries where a revolutionary class has assumed power. A new awareness is dawning on the suppressed and oppressed sections of our people as the economic crisis escalates.

specially in our urban centres, their longing for the good things of life is a healthy spur to action. They are being goaded into doing something to avert the curse of poverty.

When our young men after graduating find it difficult to obtain gainful employment and go knocking at every door, only to be turned away, their anguish and humiliation knows no limit. Why should they be expected to be conformist and behave like the rich who enjoy vastly superior resources for the satisfaction of their needs? The affluent youth who entertain one another lavishly can afford to be model citizens with lofty ideas about truth, beauty and goodness. But the youth who has nothing but his famished body to lose, joins every demonstration of protest and anger because whatever he was taught at school and college has been consumed by the fires of hunger and longing. He cannot afford the luxury of having pride in his culture or traditions or even in the land of his birth. The country is seething with thousands of young men in search of sustenance and when they are unable to obtain it their thoughts turn to violence and anger becomes the guiding force of their existence.

Twenty years of freedom have failed to provide an answer to the problems of the generation that was born into it. They will have to discover a way out and end their degradation. Leaderless, cynical and unorganised, they are unable as yet to be a part of the revolutionary forces. And yet it is this generation that will probably be driven to assume the leadership of the revolution of tomorrow. They will, I believe, fill the vacuum in the parties of the Left and provide answers to the baffling question, "Where are the future leaders of the inevitable and ultimate revolution?" Out of their agitated minds will flow fresh thoughts rejecting worn-out phrases, clichés and formulations, moulding new ideas, evolving new forms of the struggle for power. The search for new leaders cannot be mechanically organised. They will emerge as a result of movements against everything that is unjust, against every institution that seeks to fetter the mind and reduce human beings to mental levels.

Will the coming struggle for power in this vast country be fought around the Ballot Box? If the adherents of multi-party parliamentary democracy play the game honestly, the Ballot Box can replace the insurrectionary's barricade. The means never are



the decisive factors in struggles between social groups with clashing interests. If the electoral method yields results and those who are worsted accept their defeat gracefully, the victors will not indulge in meaningless bloodbaths. But history has yet to prove that peaceful transitions are lasting and capable of bringing about qualitative changes in human relationships. India's millionfold people are determined to use the Ballot Box to win social freedom. But will those who are likely to be dislodged from their ruling positions accept the verdict?

We who live amidst the shadows of the past are sometimes overwhelmed by a feeling that we are already strangers, unable to understand the emotional urges that are dominant at the moment. At times this brings a sense of desolation. But the future cannot ever reflect all the values of yesterday. The India of tomorrow will be different as it must be. Let our generation live in the hope that it will uproot whatever is evil, whatever causes men and women to weep in despair, whatever destroys happiness and brings sorrow. In the endless struggle of good against evil, peace against war, progress against reaction, the people of this land must ever be the vanguard. Is this a pious hope? To me it is as a testament of faith.

---

*Link*, January 26, 1968.

## 14. Jawaharlal Remembered

---

COLLECTING the past provides an occupation therapy for those of us who are depressed by the events of today and our inability to overcome what is wrong with these times. This is specially so in the case of people whose adult years began when Jawaharlalji was still under fifty, when Gandhiji was calling upon us to join his army of non-violent civil resisters and when nothing mattered so much as the exciting task of getting rid of our alien rulers. The slime and mud of those years were not as apparent or oppressive as they are now, the future though misty, had all the fascination of the unknown and the fatal shadow of disillusionment had not darkened our hearts and minds.

What concerned us most in those days and years gone by was not how to satisfy our personal aims and ambitions but what needed to be done for strengthening our patriotism, for enlightening our understanding, and how best we could serve the freedom struggle. We were aware of our shortcomings because Gandhiji was unsparing in his criticisms. Not only did we not mind his rebukes but we welcomed them since the reforms he insisted upon helped us to break down the barriers of class and upbringing and made us acceptable to the masses of our people. We never succeeded in drawing near enough to them as we ought to have because our class habits clung to us tenaciously and yet we did undertake periodic efforts to give them up. Even so, by adopting certain austerities for however temporary a period, we felt a little better and imagined quite conceitedly of course that we were made of sterner stuff than those outside the pale. A feeling of exhilaration at having partially experimented with Gandhian ideals of simple living swept us off our feet at times.



How mistaken we were in imagining that the discipline undergone in the Gandhi-Nehru period of the years prior to 1947 had steeled us out of our class instincts for all time!

After the death of Gandhiji with every passing year individuals and groups of nearly every shade, whether revolutionaries, intellectuals, socialists, Gandhians, or even religious-minded missionaries, have slipped into fairly comfortable berths, away from those who need them most—the dispossessed. Men and women of my generation who worked in the struggle for freedom have escaped into activities which can be only remotely related to the things we wanted to do after liberation. Our class compulsions have prevailed upon the compulsions born of the conviction that we must be of the people if we want to work for them and with them. Today at this moment of time, in Jawaharlal Nehru's words uttered so prophetically "We stand on this perilous edge of the present and the past and the future to be, and we face all manner of perils and the greatest peril is the lack of faith which comes to us, the sense of frustration that comes to us, the sinking of the heart and of the spirit that comes to us, when we see ideals go overboard. When we see the great things that we talked about some how pass into empty words and life taking a different course".

Quite possibly those who are ten or twenty years younger to us do not share this sense of defeat. But if this younger generation is full of hope and optimism about our nation and its tremendous potentialities, it has yet to assert itself and to prove its capacity to reject what is false as also its ability to create the sanctions necessary for refashioning the entire structure of present day India. May be India's new leaders are going through the process of moulding their thoughts and as and when the social unrest becomes intense and widespread a dynamic leadership will emerge and fling away those who belong to the past and stand in their way. To them, I am convinced freedom's perennial message will become irresistible if only they would read and think what Jawaharlal Nehru has written and said when he was young and rebellious, when he was full of courage and idealism, a great crusader against every form of injustice. They should not judge Nehru by what he could not achieve as the head of the Government of India. The Nehru who declared in "the pursuit itself of a mighty purpose there is joy and happiness", should be their source of inspiration.

Had circumstances and his party not failed him when he assumed authority as free India's Prime Minister, had he not brushed aside the very people who shared his convictions, could he but have offered firm resistance to conservatives and reactionaries and their allies, Jawaharlal Nehru would have lived to see the materialisation of his dream of socialist and planned society in India. He need not then have been haunted by the thought that he might not be able to keep the promises he had made to his people.

Why was he unable to exercise the enormous and matchless power given to him by his adoring compatriots and resurrect their dormant energies? Was it because his aesthetic and refined instincts prevented him from using such weapons as were necessary to destroy all that was regressive and oppressive in Indian society? He was too good a student of history not to know that genuine revolutions are not stage performances, that they have to be brought about sometimes by ruthless action often involving bloodshed and cruelty. Why then did he recoil at the thought of continuing the struggle by all means against exploitation in all its forms and not mind the inevitable mass suffering that might have followed?

I believe that his abhorrence of revolutionary means to achieve his goal, became a matter of faith with him only after Gandhiji's assassination. It shook to the depth of his being and he asked in anguished tones "what kind of triumph did Gandhiji wish for us? Not the triumph for which most people and countries strive through violence, fraud, treachery and evil means". He was so overwhelmed by the tragedy that he forgot for the moment the fact that all these reprehensible means are more often than not utilised by those who oppress and exploit innocent men and women and not by revolutionaries who seek to rescue and liberate humanity. Nevertheless as he grew older he never failed to state that he preferred to adhere to the Gandhian method of struggle and political warfare because he had come to believe that "the foundations of lasting victory can only be laid on the rock of truth".

And yet the realist in him saw that there come moments in the history of every people when it is necessary to take painful decisions, of resorting to what is known as armed or military action, be it in self-defence or in order to liberate territory occupied by an



aggressor. By implication such a decision means the abandoning of the strictly non-violent approach and Nehru realised that when all other methods fail not to take up arms means surrendering to one's foes. Were it not so he need not have agreed to the liberation of Goa, Daman and Diu in 1961. I will never forget the sad, far away look in his eyes, as I sat before him explaining the need for swift and urgent action. He was given gruesome details of what would happen in Goa if Indian troops went in by those who saw little sense of reason in challenging Portugal, of how blood would flow and thousands butchered by the greatly superior Portuguese army of occupation. I remember beseeching him not to believe such rumours, deliberately manufactured so that he might weaken his resolve at the thought of provoking bloodshed.

I am firmly of the view that had Jawaharlalji yielded to the persuasive powers of "certain friends" of India, the Goan people would have been the victims of an unimaginably cruel orgy of violence and brutality. By sending India's armed forces into this part of our enslaved soil, Nehru achieved precisely what we of the National Campaign Committee had predicted. There was much less loss of human life in Goa, Daman and Diu when India's armed forces walked into the territories under Portuguese rule than there have been in the numerous firing incidents in India in one single year during peaceful demonstrations and agitations.

Despite the growls and howls of the imperialists, Jawaharlal Nehru knew full well that at least one of the many pledges he had taken had been fulfilled. When he visited Goa many months later some of us happened to be there. We heard Jawaharlal Nehru speak at a public meeting. What his unspoken thoughts were when he gazed upwards and saw the national flag sway in the breeze we can well imagine—a tremendous sense of relief that the humiliation of India's subjection to foreign and colonial rule had come to an end.

In the long years between January 1929 when I first had a glimpse of him at the Lahore session of the Congress, 39 years ago and the quiet chat on a March evening in the year he left us, I have seen him ever so many moods. Whether he reacted angrily or tenderly — whether irritated or sympathetic, my meetings with Jawaharlalji used to be the most rewarding experience of a day usually full of frustrating difficulties. I wonder if anyone else any-

where in the world who was as big and important as he immeasurably was, could be so easily accessible to ordinary people. He had perhaps acquired this characteristic from Gandhiji whose doors were ever open to all who needed him. Now that those portals are closed to us for all time what we can do is to commune with Nehru, the revolutionary, through his writings. We can also try to understand Nehru, the State builder of free India, by studying its institutions and where necessary changing them. The burden of revitalising our people is now upon us. Let us discharge it adequately and thus pay our homage to one who did so much for his people.

---

*Link*, November 17, 1968.



## 15. Socialist-Communist Unity

THE main issue confronting socialists and communists whose roots were nourished by Indian nationalism and radicalism during the earlier years of this century, is the problem of unity, or, to be more realistic, the problem of *disunity*. Their ideological positions are so full of complexities that their reflexes to current events do not give a clear indication of their role in the social situation of today. Does the Left realise that it has a function to discharge, an overriding obligation to guide and shape events?

Analysing the behaviour of men, especially the intellectuals, is indeed not an easy task. S.A. Dange speaking on a non-political occasion said recently, "You can experiment with water, air, gases, metals, atoms and all that...but you cannot put man in a test tube" to find out why his thought and action patterns should not conform to the objective needs of society. This is indeed correct.

Radical nationalists, social reformers, scientific socialists and even Marxists do not seem to be able to agree as to what should be done immediately to start a process of concrete reconstruction of our society.

The existence of serious differences in political movements of the Left on matters of theory and practice, ideology and organisation are not peculiar to our times or our country. They have been an inevitable feature in other countries ever since the Left as we understand it took shape in the 19th century. This is probably the fate of movements led by individuals who are essentially intellectual and who tend characteristically to be oversubjective. Our national movement from the earliest years of this century has carried within it a variety of trends, ranging from extreme conservatism to extreme forms of radicalism. Imperial-

ism and its advocates in India took full advantage of these diversities even as capitalism and its apologists do so in present times. Whether it is in the national or the international situation, the leadership of the Left movement tends always to over-react in the first instance, i.e., before it can arrive at a rationally balanced conclusion about the need of the hour in terms of a commonly acceptable policy and programme. During this interregnum the affiliations of different trends within the same broad ideological framework get separately identified and become groups attached to prominent personalities and groups whose "lines" begin to determine the thought and action of the rank and file. Application of theoretical fundamentals to the objective situation (be it Marxism-Leninism or any other socialist philosophy) rouses passions and fervours that at times negate the very purpose of a collective effort at correct evaluation of the social-political forces at work.

Thus the task of devising ways and means of reaching a given goal remain undefined and neglected for long periods because the conflict of ideas get crystallised around the exponents of this or that line, associated with one or the other "leader personality" and distorted political formulations follow. Precious time, critical in the life of a growing nation, is lost in what seems to the layman as academic exercises in determining the character and role of class, the role of the parties and their response in a given situation, and in arguments and counter-arguments which only increase confusion. Set on this course these trends find it difficult to grasp the realities, the basic requirements for effective action; instead, prolonged and bitter controversies emerge which cloud the essential issues facing socialists and communists. This hair-splitting tendency leads to ideological barriers and the task of constructing revolutionary "barricades" is relegated to the background.

It is not my intention to suggest that painstaking efforts to reach ideological clarity and formulae are redundant. Far from it, because we who came to the national movement impelled by vague urgings of patriotism have suffered for want of such clarity. We realised rather late in the day that an understanding of politics devoid of its deeper implications, bereft of all scientific explanation of social phenomena, is not only inadequate but acts as a tremendous obstacle for the growth of truly revolutionary forces.



Mere awareness that some sort of a social change is all that the victims of an unjust society want, does not help a professional revolutionary in his work.

We who did not belong to the Communist or Socialist parties and groups in the earlier years of this century, but were a part and parcel of the Indian National Congress, were so immersed in the daily chores of the struggle against British rule, that it never occurred to us to examine carefully the ideological quality of the work we were doing. Our intellectual queries were stifled (by the overwhelming need to act) except of course during the long periods of incarceration when serious but haphazard reading helped us to look beyond the immediate needs of the hour. But what did we read? The literature of the French and American revolutions, and this appeared terribly revolutionary to us, till of course we came across books like Reed's 'Ten Days That Shook the World' or very battered copies of the Communist Manifesto and Gorky's 'Mother', etc. In those days Congress prisoners had no possibility of obtaining anything other than "sober and respectable" literature. Marx or Lenin or other classics on communism and socialism were out of bounds. Thus, the bulk of the radical cadre of those days had a very superficial understanding of either socialist or communist theory, notwithstanding the efforts of the Congress Socialist Party and later the Communist Party of India.

Our national leaders, as we all know, were men whose ideas were by and large utopian and liberal although Jawaharlal Nehru did his best to give a scientific explanation of social forces in India and the world. Although Lenin and Gandhiji were contemporaries, the latter had read Tolstoy and not Lenin's or Marx's writings. Even the writings of the French or British socialists of the 18th century such as Fourier and Robert Owen were unknown to them. But for Nehru we would have been ignorant about what had happened in Russia—about Lenin and the first world war developments and other exciting events at the international level between and after the two World Wars. Politics of the Congress led anti-imperialist struggles in the thirties and forties in India was thus divorced from the Marxist or even pre-Marxist socialist theories. Therefore, a series of spontaneously oriented rather than scientifically planned struggles were organized for uprooting imperialism and resisting the onslaught of its allies resulting in

needless setbacks which meant long spells of mass demoralisation.

The institutional flabbiness of the Congress as an organization which was in the forefront of our struggle for emancipation can be traced to this fact of total absence of a coherent ideological framework within which Congressmen could function. It was easy for just anyone to proclaim his or her belief in "socialism" because pragmatically it supplied both to the honest as also the unscrupulous politician a convenient slogan for hypnotising the vast masses of our impoverished citizens. Besides, social revolution and social reform were understood by many a well-meaning veteran of the nationalist movement, to be one and the same thing. Till recently they were quite unable to understand why an employed worker should want to strike and is not content with whatever he receives in lieu of his work, since, is he not better off than those who have no employment!

I have digressed deliberately from the topic of disunity of the Left because it is the product of the larger movement for national freedom. The latter, while blind to the ultimate causes of imperialism and capitalism, of war and peace, was somehow able to bring large numbers of men and women of diverse views on to a common platform. Paradoxically the Left which is led by men of much greater social insight, a higher degree of political erudition and greater moral courage and capacity to suffer for their ideological convictions, is finding it difficult to merge the revolutionary and oppositional forces together. We who in the '30s and '40s claimed to be fervent nationalists, could in moments of crisis, combine our forces and sink our differences. Why then should ardent Socialists and dedicated Communists find it so difficult to resolve the problems that divide them, even though they know they have a common quest and a common goal?

No single factor has caused so much frustration and contributed to a sense of humiliating failure in the minds of the Left intelligentsia as the persistent lack of unity in the two Socialist and the two Communist parties of our country. What are the mysterious reasons that divide their leaders? The average observer is unable to diagnose the disease that makes them so utterly indifferent and insensitive to the compelling need for unity of thought and action. The people expect the Left leadership to lead them to their



destined goals and rescue them from the agony and misery of poverty. Analysis of the causes that keep like-minded revolutionaries miles apart is one of the most imperative tasks of Left intellectuals. Can they not realise that the historic moment has arrived in India when under their leadership the masses can strike out a new path towards the Himalayan heights of a socialist society? They need to be led and guided by men and women of integrity who are supremely confident of their ultimate triumph.

The leaders of the two Communist parties and such Socialists as have not dispensed with the guidelines of Marxism and its scientific theories, owe an explanation for their fratricidal behaviour. Disciplined by their scientific temper, claiming as they legitimately can their noble role in the task of broadening the social vision of the Indian masses, claiming the right to be regarded as the true champions of the downtrodden, men who have shown a high degree of courage by braving all manner of privations and undergoing enormous sacrifices, these good leaders must furnish an answer to the question "why disunity", because it is their revolutionary and moral responsibility not to shirk the facts of life.

The million and multi-million masses for whom they have striven over these many years are yearning for a new lead. Recent events in many parts of India, not only in Bengal and Kerala, are replete with instances when they have forced the Communist and Socialist leadership to discard their outworn enmities and come forward and guide them out of the morass in which they are bogged.

Very recently, the mass urge for change has even compelled the Prime Minister of India and her colleagues to challenge the authority of monopoly. Their insistence alone has given to Indira Gandhi the confidence and courage to oppose reaction within and without her party. This is India's golden opportunity for reviving the spirit of unity among all who believe in leading the country and its people on to a future of peace and prosperity.

A new generation of Indians has arrived on the scene since the British Empire vanished in 1947. And yet the young intelligentsia of the post-freedom period has barely understood the meaning of social, cultural and democratic freedoms. With a few exceptional exceptions the bulk of them are a generation of scoffers and bitter cynics who are indifferent to the serious consequences of our fall-

ure to establish a socialist society after the end of British rule.

The enemies of socialism and democracy are not being challenged by our youth of today as they are in other countries of Asia as in Vietnam and Japan. They are not prepared to storm the citadel of reaction so that the attempt to establish a fascist dictatorship with pseudopatriotic and revivalist slogans can be foiled. They turn their face away from all revolutionary effort because they are rudderless at the moment.

I realise that Communist and Socialist parties have quite rightly no faith in the "hero" theory of leadership. They believe and I endorse the faith that it is the masses who make history by drawing individuals out of their selfish and ego-bound selves, forcing them to lead and be led. This process of interaction of individuals and the collective mass cannot surely have halted with the death of Gandhiji and the passing away of Jawaharlal Nehru? Guided as Left parties are by the interests of the masses, their leaders must respond to the mass will—nay, demand for unity, not as an end in itself, but for the completion of the glorious mission of making the people masters of their soil, of their factories, in short of every available means of production.

But not by means of slogans alone can the masses reach these goals. The search for truth and beauty means looking into the book and corner of our own minds and hearts and ridding ourselves of whatever ails the spirit. Let us bequeath to men and women in their twenties and thirties the innate qualities that are necessary for fearless courageous and sincere leaders. Let us teach them to love and live for the people, to be of them, to believe in self-effacement and not arrogant aggrandisement, to become instruments of mass action and the writers of a new chapter in our history.

Let us tell them in Albert Einstein's words that: "Socialism is directed towards a social-ethical end. Science, however, cannot create ends and, even less instil them in human beings; science, at most, can supply the means by which to attain certain ends".

Enlightened men and women of the post-freedom generation have a world to conquer and many worlds to lose. They have no option but to respond to the appeal of the masses for a united leadership for winning fresh battles in the great patriotic war



against poverty, exploitation and armed as well as unarmed imperialist aggression.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1969.

## 16. Centenary Reflections

---

The century that ends with the hundredth birthday of Gandhiji will be recorded in history as the century of India's rebirth. It has been a period of political, social and cultural upheavals, an epoch of astounding changes. But its most significant happening was that it saw the emergence of an individual whose entire life was intimately associated with the processes of India's evolution from a dormant to a pulsating society. He made India's teeming humanity aware of its strength and weakness, of what was evil in us and what was good, of how to overcome ailments and thereby redeem our heritage. Seldom has a people as numerous as we had the rare fortune to be served by one such as Gandhiji. He led us into freedom but more than that he taught us to think and act fearlessly, to be men and women to whom honesty of purpose mattered above everything else.

If anyone can claim to have called upon a nation to lead a civilised way of life it can be none other than this uniquely inspired figure of our times. But did he succeed in his mission to make us realise that ultimately what was important was an attitude of total comprehension and compassion towards one's fellow citizens, irrespective of our different cultures, our several religious practices and our divergent modes of living? His effort at reforming the individual, of purging him of what is coarse and amoral in man led him to experiment with them—experiment with truth as he saw it. All his life was devoted to making society free from the bitter intolerance ingrained in our caste-ridden and sectarian manners, to make them accept his message of communal harmony and brotherhood. But while his rational and ethical beliefs appealed, generally speaking, to the more sophisticated and politi-



cally conscious layers of our people, the vast majority interpreted his teachings in terms of their irrational and superstition-bound faiths and beliefs. The Mahatma to them was an instrument for releasing them from their social oppression and political slavery. They therefore followed his behests up to a point and broke away from his secular discipline time and again plunging him in sorrow and despair. Of course, the chosen few among his followers became 'satyagrahis'—non-violent civil resisters—during planned campaigns against colonial repression and they made, within certain limitations, heroic efforts to obey the master, in letter and spirit. But they were few in numbers and totally inadequate for the purpose of creating mass organisations because they lacked the quality of leadership so essential for sustained organisational purposes.

By insisting on the application of non-violence both on the personal and the social and political planes, Gandhiji probably felt that he would by this method convert these disciples into missionaries who would obey the higher and spiritual urges of their being and thus transform the mute millions into militant resisters. He searched incessantly for ways and means of purifying the individual so that those who led his movements could be true to his ideal of a free society. His ideal social order was one wherein men and women would cease to hate one another, would be a source of comfort and joy to all, would become humane, progressive and peace loving. "For me patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane. We must hate the sin but not the sinner", were thoughts he uttered from the depth of his sincere and sensitive being. He was passionately convinced that the human spirit could triumph over its animal instincts by a process of discipline, by cultivating habits of deep introspection, by not relying on the intellect only as a means for gaining experience and knowledge. And yet, he was emphatically of the view that him was not philosophy of individual salvation. To work, live and die for the progress of one and all, without any distinction of race or class was his chief aim, his dearest aspiration. He was therefore no believer in the ivory towerism of conventional savants and recluses, or an orthodox stereotyped redeemer of "lost souls".

Gandhi, the greatest among India's numerous social reformers and foremost of its liberators, was not merely a man of faith but a

man of action who fought injustice on every plane, a realist who experimented with both ideas as well as men and women. Whether against imperialism or Indian fanaticism his anguished protests and calls for action were carried far and wide, rousing a dormant people out of their apathy and indolence, urging them to meet the oppressors even if the price to be paid was life itself.

The powerful mass movements Gandhiji led throughout his life often culminating in imprisonment were instrumental in bringing about a new political awakening in our country, and inculcating in the people a sense of resurgent nationhood. But these upheavals did not last long enough to bring about deeper qualitative changes in our mental and spiritual attitudes. We lapsed into ordinariness as soon as the struggles subsided. Our enthusiasm for and dedication to the cause of political freedom was not matched by an equally ardent desire to reject outmoded and meaningless values. The social behaviour patterns of the mass of our people remained untouched, despite Gandhiji's tireless effort to renovate and reform individuals rooted in the stagnant past. The spadework needed to loosen age-old superstition and prejudice required patient, painstaking effort, unhampered by fanatical outbursts and frequent diversions. Gandhiji tried very hard to carry on this activity even when his attention was focussed on the political crisis of the period, but the demands of the freedom struggle did not permit him to devote his attention exclusively to problems of social and individual reform, and hence the basic shortcomings of those who flocked to him for guidance.

As Gandhiji's life neared the fatal hour of his assassination, the realisation that he had not succeeded in instilling in the Indian mind his cherished spiritual values had saddened him greatly. When the tidal waves of inhuman violence, hatred and barbarism engulfed India in the first few weeks after British rule had ended, his desire to live wilted and withered. The agonising experience of these gruesome orgies had seared his heart well before the bullet that killed him. He who wanted human beings to be instruments of universal love and brotherly harmony was horrified to find them behaving like savages. The sculptor in him threw away the chisel in disgust as the hateful events of those days swept across our land like a hurricane revealing our hideousness and the utterly barbarous aspects of our national character.



And now while we and the world are preparing to pay homage to Gandhiji's memory, history has once again with cruel irony enacted on his own soil the horrid scenes that preceded his death. The world may well ask, is it by spilling innocent blood that India has ours one who gave every fibre of his life for her redemption from slavery and moral degradation? Must carnage and arson be our offering to him who loved his people, suffered and died for them? Can we learn afresh the lessons that Gandhiji taught and address ourselves to the task of cleansing and disinfecting diseased minds? Can these ugly manifestations underlying our "progress" at the top bring all who share the ideal of peace and equality together? Can we work unitedly for the total eradication and liquidation of poisonous growths, nourished by the dark forces of reaction?

The truest way to commemorate Gandhiji's birth centenary is to launch a nation-wide struggle against religious intolerance, dogmatic fanaticism and irrational beliefs. Let us therefore round our masses in the spirit of purposeful militancy against their social disabilities, against their squalor and their ignorance. Let us go to people who have no means of earning a livelihood, no hope of leading a decent way of life and organise them, to make them the builders of a new order, Indians who will disdain all that is hateful and mean in our heritage. Let it be clearly understood that only if we struggle for the vindication of the social and economic rights of the millions can we defeat the evil designs of the people's enemies. The legacy of Gandhi cannot be preserved in monuments of stone or steel, it has to be founded in men's hearts and minds.

---

*Link*, October 5, 1969.

## 17. Opportunity for Progress

THE pernicious legacies of colonialism have not been liquidated even though it ceased to oppress us politically twentythree years ago, on the 15th of August 1947. The task of demolishing the feudal superstructures we inherited from our pre-colonial period (or those that evolved after British power established itself) has not been completed because the effort to do so could not be unified on the basis of a commonly accepted national programme of reconstruction. "The politics of competition" substituted the "politics of consensus" with the advent of political independence and everyone who was anyone in the political field became engrossed in the struggle for power.

An analysis of the institutional changes on the political and social level in India after British rule came to an end reveals that although power had been transferred, the old vehicles of power remained, whether in the form of the Constituent Assembly, Parliament, the Legislatures, or the administrative and military apparatus. They were all modelled on the British pattern of institutions of Government; no serious or systematic effort was made to adapt them to suit Indian conditions and where necessary bring about changes.

Thus the British bequeathed not only their language but all the traditions and conventions they had evolved during their century-and-a-half stay in India. A political system based on adult suffrage, it was taken for granted by those who took over from the British, would result in an Indian reproduction of the two-party pendulum of Britain's Parliament, reflecting by and large conservative and radical opinion in the country. The dominant political leadership of the early years did not foresee what eventually happened,



namely the emergence of several political parties with differing platforms, verbose election manifestoes and demagogic appeals. Hardly anyone of these parties attempted to explain to their followers the relevance of modern ideas and values embodying a new way of life. With every succeeding general election a variety of regional and even sub-regional political parties have come into existence, whereas the parties at the national level have splintered into two or more groups. The issues on which all these parties claim leadership of the vast population of this country range from concrete economic demands to dark obscurantist urges.

The national upsurge of the days when the imperialist dictatorship held India in its grip vanished soon after foreign rule ended. With the partition of India and the carnage that followed it, Gandhiji's and Jawaharlal Nehru's charismatic influence dwelled, their cherished dreams clothed in garments of the noblest of ethical ideals receded, patriotism acquired strait-jacketed and sectarian interpretations, and slowly but surely the old battle-cry of national unity lost its *raison d'être*. The concept of Indian nationhood which was easily accepted during the struggle against imperialism changed drastically, primarily due to the acceptance by a section of people of the false two-nation theory with its disastrous political consequences. After independence the compulsion for joint effort weakened steadily because for a long time there was no "national emergency" which could bring them together, except for brief moments during the Chinese and Pakistani attacks.

The failure of the progressive and Left forces lay in the fact that they did not meet this challenge to the secular concept of nationhood by immediately going to the people and telling them that a nation divided against itself cannot either gain economic strength or raise its unison and defeat counter-revolution and its hordes, solidating their forces, parties that believe in socialism and share the conviction that an egalitarian order must be based on secularism, a multi-social and a multi-religious community, have been drifting away from one another. Their disunity is helping the reactionary and conservative elements to suck the masses into their fold and poison their minds with irrational prejudices.

As things are, with the erstwhile united leadership divided and sub-divided the masses are bewildered and confused and unable to

determine their line of action, their way out of a state of gnawing poverty, prolonged unemployment and nagging deprivation.

The unfortunate conflict in the Left, if it becomes more and more tense is sure to lead to further disintegration of the sense of unity among the people. It will create a situation in which communal, parochial and obscurantist forces will make common cause, because the year 1970 is drawing to its close and the shadow of the general election has already fallen across the land. The contention for political power inevitably are engaging themselves in activities that according to their calculations will strengthen their position and enable them to win the electoral battle that lies ahead. Obviously, the massive unrest among the landless peasantry and urban working classes, the growing discontent of the average citizen because of the devastating impact of high prices and unemployment cannot be ignored by any party of the Left. They have no option but to come forward and identify themselves with the harassed sections of our people. Simultaneously, all the parties opposed to any basic institutional changes in the present social and political order are bound to react perversely and create conditions for thwarting the Left and progressive parties in their bid to win the people's confidence. The reactionary forces are therefore exploiting every possible occasion to convert the struggle for popular demands of the masses into religious and caste conflicts.

The pre-election period is thus likely to be a period in which attempts will be made to intensify all divisive movements by raising contradictory and conflicting slogans and engineering violent clashes so that efforts to build a movement for solidarity against social oppression and economic exploitation may fail. The forces that hope to gain by greater disruption are on the alert and are trying hard to unify their own leadership. They are also raising false and absurd slogans to mislead and divert the people's minds into parochial and revivalist ways of thinking.

The prevailing situation in the country should cause grave concern among the enlightened intelligentsia and its political representatives because it is fraught with dangerous potentialities. Politics cannot be an end in itself, the problems facing the country are numerous, complicated and pressing and cannot be solved except on the basis of a united national effort. The forthcoming elections provide, through the mechanism of democratic choice, an occa-



sion for changing the composition of the new legislatures. A concerted nationwide effort can result in the success at the polls of genuine believers in socialism, who can bring about a qualitative change in the parliamentary system in India. This is possible if the progressive parties give up the temptation to compete with one another, devise ways and means of removing all misunderstandings and act among themselves in a spirit of patriotic co-operation. The events of the past need not necessarily dog their footsteps; as representatives of the millions who are denied prosperity and enlightenment, they should be able to advance in union and defeat counter-revolution and its hordes.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1970.

## 18. Vigilant Leadership for a Vigilant People

---

AUGUST has always been a significant month in our political calendar. It has become, ever since the unleashing of our people's passionate urge for freedom from foreign domination in 1942, a historic month. It witnesses every year the ritualised observance of India's independence when on the 15th of the month men and women in hundreds of thousands assemble near the Red Fort to hear the Prime Minister's survey of the scene at home and abroad.

The collective response of urban masses as they sit listening to important leaders delivering oratorical exhortations, specially of those belonging to the establishment, is one of spontaneous approval. Their patriotic fervour however does not last very long, because no sooner do they return to the privacy of their homes, they begin to wonder if the promises and pledges of change for a better future, are realisable. Collectively, as part of a large mass, people's reactions are usually in sharp contrast to what they think and feel as individuals. When under the influence of spellbinding speeches, the generality of men and women forget the harsher realities of life. As part of a crowd they are able to share a commonly felt optimism, but as soon as they return to their individual worlds, they relapse into cynicism. As the sound of lofty proclamations recedes, they begin to think and feel differently, telling themselves that perhaps in the far away future a brave new world of social equality and golden opportunities for one and all will materialise—but not so today or tomorrow or even the day after. The immediate present, however, is what matters to most adults since as far as they are concerned the future is not for them, it is for others of another generation.



Although the politically conscious elements do not normally take this entirely negative view of life, they are in any event in a minority. It is the silent majority which is prone to suffer pangs of frustration, and when it participates in events such as the Independence Day rally or the Republic Day parade, it allows itself to be lulled into a sense of wellbeing. Besides our national celebrations, there are the innumerable festivals associated with primitive cults and religious rituals when periodically men and women manage to escape the drudgery of daily living and indulge in collective wishful thinking. This is as it should be, because otherwise life would become intolerably burdensome and even if such respites are brief the change helps to break the monotony of routine. But these are essentially a subjective and superficial reading of the way masses have thought and felt immediately after Independence and till very recently. Gradually, over the years the mass mood has been undergoing a change, specially after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru. From the 1967 general election onwards, to the mid-term poll this year, the political thinking of the people has taken rapid strides. The fact that the Congress was unable to retain its customary hold on the masses when it pleaded vehemently for another term of office in 1967 proved that they had attained greater maturity.

Their refusal to accept the bona fides of an organisation, however venerated in the past, because it permitted its fossilised, old and exhausted leaders to block all avenues of progress, clearly showed that the earlier attitude of acquiescence and docility was undergoing a change. The death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964 marked the beginning of the end of blind faith in the Indian National Congress. Thereafter, the progressively inclined people in general began to drift away, and during the 1967 poll shifted their allegiance to the Communist and Socialist parties. Ironically, large sections in certain regions, in their search for alternatives to the Congress (wherever the Left was weak or practically nonexistent) voted in favour of parties of the extreme Right, their reactionary and sectarian outlook notwithstanding.

Observers of the pre-poll scene in 1967 had nevertheless predicted that despite its vested interest orientation, and inner-party dissensions, the Congress would manage to retain its majorities in the legislatures, would continue to rule the States and remain in

power at the Centre.

The election results, however, upset all such calculations, causing jubilation among the non-Congress parties, specially of the Left. A new phase of power-relationship began in India with the experiment of governments led by a United Front of Left parties in several States. However, strangely enough, even the United Front Governments much to the disappointment of progressive sections of public opinion did not last long.

This dismal collapse was due mainly to incompatibility of ideas and lack of mutual trust among the coalescing partners—a sad admission that the Left leadership had not kept pace with the growing maturity of the masses. The disintegration of the Left, at a time when social forces, dormant for centuries, were becoming conscious of their potential capacities, could have been arrested had serious attempts to restore the United Front Governments succeeded. But unfortunately with every passing month the cleavages increased, with the result that the forward thrust of the progressive forces and mass pressures lost their earlier vitality.

The collapse of non-Congress regimes in Bengal and Kerala and the growing disunity in the Left, disillusioned large numbers of people all over the country. Since every basic problem affecting the masses remained unsolved, the processes necessary for coordinated national advance were thwarted. Wave after wave of communal riots, and increasing anti-social and misguided political violence created a generally felt crisis of confidence in the country which inevitably encouraged the Right to assert itself. As factionalism became a common malady in both the Leftist and the Congress camps, the peoples' faith in the integrity of political parties and its leaders dwindled. The Congress, in particular, was a house divided against itself, mouthing slogans and empty phrases, unable to offer constructive solutions for reducing the common peoples' burdens.

When a state of near-chaos began to prevail, and realising that the situation could become disastrous mainly due to the peoples' mounting dissatisfaction and acutely felt irritation, Indira Gandhi decided to intervene. By bringing about the removal of Morarji Desai from office and initiating a series of radical measures which eventually led to the split in the Congress, she was able to achieve what had seemed impossible. Almost overnight she



started cleansing the Augean stables of the old Congress and restored to it the vitality it had lost. In politics, charisma by itself does not invest an individual with the extraordinary ability to rouse a nation. Awakened human beings demand action, some immediate proof that those who aspire to lead them believe in putting an end to social and economic stagnation.

Indira Gandhi's success at the polls in the 1971 general election was not merely due to the many advantages she had inherited, but because of her timely realisation that it is not enough to hold on to office even if it be the highest in the land. The desperation of the masses, the revival of terrorism by many groups of angry young people, and indications that fascist minded organisations were exploiting the situation, led Indira Gandhi to the conclusion that some major obstacles to progress had to go. True, the people of India gave the Congress party their massive electoral sanction to proceed but essentially in this case it was not the organisation but the individual leading it who won their wholehearted support. They rejected not only the forces representing backwardness in all its forms, but by and large even parties committed to a revolutionary change in the social order.

There are many who are apprehensive that the promises and pledges made by the political leadership of the Congress may continue to remain on paper only. The mass awakening we have witnessed in recent months is not a superficial and temporary phase of excitement. It can and should lead to greater organised strength in the people. The progressive forces within and outside the Congress can help to organise and lead movements for the implementation of radical reforms. There are never any permanent means of guaranteeing progress towards desired goals. A vigilant leadership of a vigilant people can defend their right to life, liberty and happiness. The Independence Day rally this year will be qualitatively different from previous years, because there are some neighbours who are threatening our freedom and want to humble us. We have no option other than to resolve that we shall never again permit hostile forces to destroy this precious heritage.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1971.

## 19. End of the Two-Nation Myth

MEMORIES of 1971 will cling to every adult mind in India for a very long period of time. Ruminating about the past, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that "there is a stillness and everlastingness about the past... it has a touch of eternity".

When future generations turn over the pages of history and read about the story of the martyrdom of millions of Bangla Desh and their liberation, they are sure to be filled with similar awe and admiration because this luminous chapter in the history of India and Bangla Desh will impart confidence and courage to nationals of both the countries. The impact of the struggle of an entire people, of their heroic endurance against the pogroms practised by military barbarians, of their bestial and lustful behaviour towards women will haunt for a very long time people who are sensitive to human suffering.

The storms and upheavals that have devastated and ravaged Bangla Desh, the anguished experience undergone by men and women, bereaved and bereft of life's most precious possessions reminded one of the Nazi terror in Germany. But with the passage of time, these grim happenings and the subsequent triumph, will appear to be the prelude to very significant changes in this part of the globe.

The thinking and way of life of people in India and its neighbour Bangla Desh, will inevitably be very different hereafter because both have suffered together for the commonly shared conviction that religion need not be a barrier to freedom and friendly fraternal relations. As the years go by, the bonds forged in the crucial fight against tyranny will be strengthened, and embittered



memories of a quarter century of hatred, fear and suspicion will give place to a sincere relationship of comradeship.

Never again can the teachings of mediaeval and religious fanaticism poison the understanding of two sovereign neighbours, each determined to defend its independence, each convinced that its primary task is to wage a war against poverty. The need to overcome the obstacles to a prosperous future, inherited from their long colonial past, will unite them against their enemies old and new. Both the nations will emerge as champions of the oppressed, always vigilant, wary and determined not to lose sight of the fundamentals of socialism, secularism and democracy. Shared values are always a cementing force, and with so much in common, the peoples of India and Bangla Desh need never fear or be suspicious of one another as they were previously. Moreover, they can complement their resources and energies to further the attainment of new goals and objectives enabling their people to participate in the scientific and technological revolution that is forging ahead elsewhere in the world.

The popular belief that history never repeats itself may or may not be historically valid. Only a research scholar can unearth the origins of this dictum. But that it is men who make history and that whenever necessary they correct whatever needs correction has been proved by the facts of current developments in this part of Asia.

A full quarter of a century had to elapse before the people of erstwhile East Pakistan, ruthlessly exploited by their fellow-countrymen in the West, could realise that religion alone cannot be the basis for defining a nation. The imperialists misled and misguided these people by planting the obnoxious and false two-nation theory in their hearts. However, the brave millions of Bangla Desh have had the courage to acknowledge their mistake and declared from the house-tops that the foundations of a nation cannot be built on fanaticism and religious bigotry or unscientific and obscurantist and therefore untenable social theories.

The freedom movement in undivided India was founded on two principles of fundamental importance, namely national unity and democracy. All the political parties that emerged during the British regime were governed by their own constitutions which based themselves on democratic rules and principles. The Congress,

specially after Gandhiji and Nehru assumed its leadership, insisted that decision-making must be left to local committees at every level, in rural and urban areas. Besides, anti-imperialism was the key objective of all democratic and left political parties and their membership was open to every one, irrespective of religion, caste, community or language.

The Congress and other secular parties, prior to independence, knew that the British Government although it paid lip-service to "unity and democracy" encouraged all manner of civil discord and strife between different religious groups so as to destroy the growing cohesion among freedom-loving forces.

Therefore, the religious-communal organisations in India under British rule, as is well known, were the creations of a foreign power whose sole role was to confuse the masses and prevent them from joining the struggle for independence. Unfortunately, democratic politicians with extreme narrowness of outlook and with hardly any commitment to radical programmes or any truly liberal school of thought succeeded in luring the Muslims and a section of depressed Hindu masses in India away from the Indian revolutionary mainstream. Thus, during a crucial phase of the anti-imperialist movement in our country the Muslim League was able to win over some sections of the masses by claiming special protection and privileges for them which it insisted were being denied to Muslims by the essentially upper caste-based Hindu Congress.

This was the backdrop of the political scene in the country when in 1947 the British were forced to concede that their sway over India had to come to an end. But the policy-makers in England realised that the consequences of their loss of power over this vast and populous sub-continent could be mitigated considerably, provided puppet organisations such as the Muslim League were made to insist on the country's division prior to British "withdrawal". The leaders of the Muslim League thus became their willing tool and blackmailed the leaders of the Congress, who alone were in a position to persuade the militant and radical masses into acquiescing with the partition of India. The threat of a long-drawn civil war resulting in the massive killing of innocent men and women unnerved Gandhiji. He could not bring himself to be a party to the fanatical orgy of death and destruction of thou-



sands, and therefore much against his will and very reluctantly, he called upon the nation to pay the price. The Mountbatten plan for a peaceful transfer of power, provided the partitioning of India was agreed to by the Congress, was eventually accepted. Everyone who mattered in the Congress concurred that although this meant the abandoning of a vital principle its acceptance would prevent fratricide and terrible suffering on a mass scale.

Gandhiji's agony of mind and spirit knew no bounds when communal forces unleashed a reign of terror and carnage, as soon as the British left India. He felt humiliated because he knew he had failed in his mission of peace and harmony. His gentle heart, so full of true love for the lowliest of the low, whatever their caste, creed or colour, was already broken when a dastardly murderer fired that fatal shot. Seldom have a people paid such a heavy price for their freedom as did the people of India before partition.

However, a chapter full of calamities and disasters came to an end and it was believed that this would be the beginning of the end of communal holocausts. India and Pakistan living in harmony would be free to refashion their future. Jawaharlal Nehru earnestly believed that our two countries which had so much in common could live in amity and cooperation and work together for a new social order in which the poverty-stricken masses could at last breathe the air of freedom. But the shrewd imperialists (to begin with British and later American) had other plans.

Pakistan's servile leaders were prevented from responding to India's proffered hand of friendship. Obviously enmity between India and Pakistan was essential for the success of their aim to make Asians fight Asians. And subsequently hatred and hostility towards India became the key policy of a series of military and dictatorial regimes foisted on the people of Pakistan by American imperialists. Their democratic urges were crushed, their cry for civil liberty suppressed over and over again till the freedom loving sons and daughters of the Eastern wing rose in rebellion. Successive massive resistance struggles against the authoritarian dictatorship were carried on under the indomitable leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, culminating in the historic events of March 1971. Throughout these months, the freedom struggle of the Bangla Desh people, peasant, worker and intelligentsia, went on gathering momentum while the American Government did every-

thing it could to encourage their oppressors, whereas the Socialist countries led by the Soviet Union extended their sympathy and support to the valiant fighters.

At long past Bangla Desh's hour of destiny arrived when intoxicated by the lust for power the insane rulers of Pakistan turned their wrath against India. Indira Gandhi's superb and competent leadership has succeeded in closing a sad chapter of Asian history, by seizing the opportunity not only to repel aggression but by responding to the appeal of the tortured millions in Bangla Desh.

By deciding to defend by every means at our disposal the right of the 75 million people of Bangla Desh to live freely and fearlessly, our people and their Government removed a threat to freedom in Asia but helped to preserve world peace.

Gandhiji and Nehru were greatly saddened when the former masters of India out-manoeuvred them by splitting the country by bribing the leaders of a powerful religious minority to play their game. Had they lived to witness the day when the banner of freedom fluttered in Bangla Desh and heard Mujibur Rahman proclaiming that a new state would rise on the foundations of secularism, socialism and democracy, they would have exulted in the thought that posterity had upheld their cherished values. Therefore this year's Republic Day should be an occasion for thanksgiving, and a day of dedication to the ideals for which so many have perished.

---

*Link*, January 26, 1972.



ple who framed their laws and institutions prior to our insect origin of yesterday", he was expressing (with commendable magnanimity) the Indian nationalist intelligentsia's feelings of indignation and anger against the British rulers.

Therefore, half a century before independence and more particularly in the latter part of it, Indians of outstanding ability, talent and remarkable strength of character came forward to spread the message of freedom, propagated the gospel of a new thinking, calling upon every son and daughter of India to rise and snap their chains. Great pioneers of the freedom movement, even before Gandhi and his eminent contemporaries started their work, organised public opinion by asking the educated classes to give up the slave mentality and take a vow to liberate the motherland. They taught them the difference between right and wrong, between honour and dishonour, the meaning of a principled way of life and a life that is purposeless and therefore barren.

Gandhiji in particular felt that these ancient and basic values had to be revived because during India's long years of slavery and social decay we had lost the essentials of our spiritual moorings and faith in our capacity to free ourselves. He more than any one else became our constant and daily mentor, from the early twenties of this century, flaying us for our stupid narrowness of outlook, our rigid caste taboos and our cowardly acceptance of the white man's claim to intellectual and moral superiority. The historical process that enabled the people of India to develop the will to resist the "mighty" imperialist who ruled over them began in 1857 and ended on the 30th of January, 1948, when Gandhiji, its finest flower, was killed by a cowardly, reactionary imperialist agent.

The heart that stopped beating on that catastrophic day was big and warm, it had room in it for men and women of many beliefs—or even unbelief—the so-called terrorist, the Communist, the socialist, the humble and the arrogant, everyone who desired to draw near it was free to do so. Though a firm believer in his own concept of truth and non-violence, Gandhiji's was not a dogma-ridden mind. His catholicity was as profound as his faith in the unseen power he called God. And today on the 25th anniversary of our freedom we owe it to ourselves to acknowledge once again our gratitude to this unique human being of our times, who

## 20. The Unfulfilled Task

BEFORE independence those of us who were not mere observers of the political scene were motivated by ideological urges and inspired by the ideal of liberty in our thinking and functioning. This was not surprising because whatever is trivial, mean and selfish in human nature recedes into the background under the impact of extraordinary circumstances. We were fortunate indeed that we attained adulthood in times when the social and political milieu in India was saturated with the fiery spirit of militant nationalism. This is not to suggest that all of us were paragons of virtue or free from the usual human failings and shortcomings. But the rarefied climate of the quarter century that preceded the advent of political freedom compelled even ordinary men and women to rid themselves of their mundane and petty ambitions. They risked the good life, they suffered and the very brave among them even walked up to the gallows with glowing eyes and smiling lips.

With minds constantly enriched by the writings, speeches and talks of the Tagore-Gandhi-Nehru triad, the youth of those times were curious, eager to assimilate the experience of India's renaissance and anxious to learn about the events that had led to its enslavement. They longed to acquaint themselves with the experience of revolutionary movements elsewhere in the world, specially in the Soviet Union, so as to absorb whatever was applicable to India. Every young person who belonged to the educated classes whether in metropolitan cities or small towns, was intensely conscious of the fact that we were a subject people, ruled by a handful of Englishmen far below us in the scale of civilisation. When Edmund Burke speaking about Indians said, nearly two hundred years ago, "God forbid that we should pass judgement upon a peo-



taught us to fear no man, but to be true to the inner voice of one's conscience, which alone can be the sole arbiter of our actions.

After him came Jawaharlal Nehru, the heir to the legacy of the Gandhian age, who did his best to retain the essence of his master's political and social outlook by setting them in the framework of modern thought, during the seventeen years of his stewardship of free India. Nehru, the founder and builder of our newly freed nation enshrined his idealism in the nobly worded Directive Principles of the Constitution, but even while he lived, the earlier elite mate had changed. The market place politician began to push away people belonging to the earlier era; opportunism and not patriotism was what counted.

This was perhaps inevitable in a situation where almost overnight the management of a vast country and its vaster aggregation of human beings was taken over by people whose primary experience lay in smashing the administration and not running it. The assumption of authority by the Indian people 25 years ago unlocked all the gates that had barred their way hitherto, providing new opportunities to the richer classes and the intelligentsia for wielding political and economic power. Those who had participated in the freedom struggle except for the elite, were unable to seize the new opportunities because the bulk of them were not intellectually equipped for the new tasks. They slipped into oblivion, although some half-hearted efforts were made from time to time to recognise their "services". Inevitably, the simple and unassuming types who had dedicated themselves to freedom's cause were forgotten and only the ones who had the capacity to struggle through or swim with the tide continued to be in the limelight.

The dream of a free India dreamt by many for almost a century, from decade to decade, has come true. There is no foreign master now who can thwart our desire to transform the country, to provide its millions with what they need for a culturally harmonious and economically satisfying way of life. And yet while freedom is now with us the general happiness that was to follow is still far behind. By and large the old economic structure continues, and the capacity of the privileged classes to exploit has not sufficiently been curbed. True, the masses have not been inactive and have thrown up agitational challenges over the years but the energetic social action involving vast numbers of people essential for weak-

ening the grip of the possessing classes on our political and economic levers has not materialised.

In theory, the State belongs to the people and is managed by its chosen representatives; even so, the actual masters are suffering incredible hardships and their most elementary requirements are not available to them. The conclusion therefore becomes inescapable that something is amiss with the present leadership. The masses have never failed them nor refused to play their part if led and organised by men of faith, vision and integrity.

When in the past they were called upon to resist the authority of the British Government in India they always came forward, sacrificing all they possessed, undergoing long terms of imprisonment during which they used to be beaten, flogged and subjected to other forms of torture. Fear of punishment never held them back. Today the tasks are much simpler, they have only to be taught to mobilise their energies involved in bringing about institutional changes, to build a new society of truly free men and women. A nation-wide movement to create a new world for themselves and their children would enthuse them and galvanise them into action if they could be convinced about the genuineness of their leaders. The only explanation for their apathy and lack of enthusiasm can be traced to their want of faith in a leadership which consists of individuals who belong to a class afraid of change and content with *status quo*. The revolutionary intelligentsia of the freedom movement was able to inspire because they put into practice what they preached, suffering all manner of hardships and did not just theorise about revolution from a safe distance, away from the scene of action.

The present system of government is based on the consent of the sons of the soil but this consent has become mechanical. Though they know that it is the wealthier classes who are its main beneficiaries, who can obtain whatever they need, who wield power and authority and are very conscious of their superior status, they do not appear to be capable of effective protest. Occasionally, under popular pressure, some laws are enacted to curb the avaricious tendencies of the ruling cliques; but when they are manipulated and sabotaged, the masses and those who claim to work for them seem helpless.

During elections to Parliament and Assemblies there is always



loud talk of abolishing a system that exploits the working masses both rural and urban, of bringing about social equality and of refashioning the structure that has led to their impoverishment and unhappiness. But, once the elections are over, the struggle for existence continues to be as grimly unrewarding and as bitter as before. Unfulfilled pledges and promises made by ambitious politicians over the years have made our people apathetic, without hope. Nonetheless, a courageous band of leaders that can still forge an organic bond with the people, can restore their faith and harness their energies for creating wealth for themselves, out of our vast natural resources.

The "Left" in India, whether "old" or "new", could have provided this leadership had it been less confused. Tragically its confusion appears to have increased after imperialism retreated from our shores. Ideological hair splitting or learned formulations about the causes of the present economic predicament and its consequences do not impress the people in the rural and urban areas of the country. Some among the friends of the people belonging to the "left" who honestly believe in bringing about an egalitarian social system and the organisations to which they belong, do make efforts to espouse their cause by organising mass demonstrations and protests. But most of these have the appearance of moves on a chess board. These struggles may be for land or higher wages and therefore have in them potentialities for involving the greatest part of the nation; but usually they whimper into silence, accepting petty solaces.

Gandhiji could mobilise the millions in a remarkably short span of time because his approach was very different. His technique of identifying himself with them completely was so successful that people believed in him, trusted him and followed him. They knew that he had given up all that the affluent want, that he therefore had not personal axe to grind and above all that it was an article of faith with him to never accept any office of power and pomp. Obviously, it was humanly impossible, even in those years of national upsurge for more than a handful to follow in his footsteps, but his magnetic and compelling personality succeeded in influencing may illustrious individuals from the leisured and well to do classes. They had to accept the logic of his argument that if they were serious about joining the liberation struggle, they would

have to give up ostentation, mingle with the humblest of the humble, look upon the very poorest of the poor and downtrodden as their comrades in arms. Surprisingly, these sophisticated people who came to join the ranks of freedom struggle accepted his leadership with a remarkable degree of discipline for as long as it lasted. It was only when they became the leaders of the new establishment that they forgot whatever he had taught them.

Gandhiji used to insist that the practice of austerity was not meant to be an end in itself, but as a form of penance and also personal discipline, to enable the upper class nationalist leaders to forge a link with people who were without work and hungry, but who had to be organised and mobilised in the non-violent war of independence. The arm chair cynics of those years, belonging to the Left generally, looked upon all this superciliously as nothing more than utopian fads. But the simple minded ardent youth, students, men and women went to the masses, accepted his advice because they knew what Gandhiji was aiming at. When the villager saw city-bread folks wearing home spun cloth (because the wearing of mill-made foreign cloth was prohibited by Gandhiji) he was stirred and drew nearer to the followers of the "Mahatma", the friend of Daridranarayan. The leadership of the national struggle was of course drawn from the well-to-do middleclass intelligentsia and therefore had all the failings of this class, it vacillated and often deserted the battle-field. But the stalwarts among them had earned the admiration of the common man, because these successful and affluent men sacrificed their flourishing professions, courted hardships, endured long terms of imprisonment, permitted confiscation of their property and took all manner of risks, some of them even to the point of endangering their lives.

The times have changed. Politics is looked upon as a means of personal enrichment and influence. Election to legislatures is an investment which brings good dividends to the successful politician, his family and friends. The fearless dedicated qualities needed of a political being 25 years ago are considered redundant and unnecessary. The hard and selfless worker is not wanted because in parliamentary politics the manipulator and buyer of votes is the most important person. The new comers on the national political stage are shrewd, clever and calculating persons, who ridicule and ignore those who preach austerity. They assume it is their right to



Inevitably, the generation that was born after independence of India was not the one that was in its teens before it has responded to the present environment in which values that permeated the atmosphere then appear to be irrelevant. Any attempt at orienting their minds in terms of revolutionary ideologies is scoffed at because even Marxism, according to them, has failed to resolve the problems that confront us. The educational and cultural norms of our universities have not helped the student generation to think of themselves as instruments of change. This educated minority, the youth of a country which is in a transitional phase, has grown up in a moral vacuum and therefore is unable to play any effective role. There are students and youth movements but they are confined to fashionable factional struggles in colleges and universities. The deliberate manner in which false values of life have been permitted to penetrate the educational institutions, has deprived the post-freedom generation of its natural birth right—the desire to live and die for in Nehru's words, "the first cause in the world—the liberation of mankind."

In recent times, Indira Gandhi has sensed that we have many miles to go before India can claim to be near that much-desired goal. Her party, the Indian National Congress has been freed of elements which stood in the way of urgently needed progress towards a Socialist State. She has declared that the nation under her leadership will remove the causes that keep the people naked, hungry and homeless. But can a single individual, even with overwhelming mass approval, even though she has the apparatus of the state at her disposal, accomplish this task?

**The Quit India resolution of 1942 became a battle cry and**

[illegible]



be compensated in terms of material comforts for such services as they render. The establishment of the day has sucked in even such of us into its vortex who during the earlier period had volunteered to be with the disinherited millions; we also along with the new elite are drifting away from the people.

Inevitably, the generation that was born after independence of even the one that was in its teens before it has responded to the present environment in which values that permeated the atmosphere then appear to be irrelevant. Any attempt at orienting their minds in terms of revolutionary ideologies is scoffed at because even Marxism, according to them, has failed to resolve the problems that confront us. The educational and cultural norms in our universities have not helped the student generation to think of themselves as instruments of change. This educated minority, the youth of a country which is in a transitional phase, has grown up in a moral vacuum and therefore is unable to play any effective role. There are students and youth movements but they are confined to fashionable factional struggles in colleges and universities. The deliberate manner in which false values of life have been permitted to penetrate the educational institutions, has deprived the post-freedom generation of its natural birth right—the desire to live and die for in Nehru's words, "the first cause in the world—the liberation of mankind."

The most compelling argument of overthrowing the imperialist order in India used to be that otherwise the impoverishment and emasculation of its people would continue. It is twenty five years since we got rid of the hated imperialist, but can we claim that we are nearer our objectives of a society in which all its citizens are free and equal in terms of food, cloth and shelter?

In recent times, Indira Gandhi has sensed that we have many miles to go before India can claim to be near that much-desired goal. Her party, the Indian National Congress has been freed of elements which stood in the way of urgently needed progress towards a Socialist State. She has declared that the nation under her leadership will remove the causes that keep the people naked, hungry and homeless. But can a single individual, even with overwhelming mass approval, even though she has the apparatus of the state at her disposal, accomplish this task?

The Quit India resolution of 1942 became a battle cry and re-

led thousands of men and women, old and young, who threw themselves in the struggle with just "Do or Die" as their directive. The "Garibi Hatao" directive succeeded in rallying votes for the Congress because those who voted for it believed that Indira Gandhi wanted in all sincerity to redeem the pledge. But does the Congress of today have the faith that their forerunners had?

No one is called upon to go to the gallows or to prison or even remain "underground" for launching an assault on the vested interests. Not adventurism but a new adventure in which the masses are involved should be undertaken by the younger generation and their leaders provided they realise (as we did 30 and more years ago) that poverty (whether physical or intellectual) cannot be removed without a struggle. For this, the young men and women of today have to go once again to the people and lead them in the battle against hunger and ignorance, just as the leaders of the freedom movement battled against the British in years gone by. Every community or social education centre, every health clinic, primary and higher secondary school, every college in a university campus, can become a vital centre for implementing the governmental plans provided they work under the guidance of a nucleus of selfless and enlightened non-governmental social workers. Discouraging new ways and means of stimulating social vigilance can expose corruption, thus utilising the nation's resources for public weal and not individual gain. Where are the leaders who have the patience and energy to devote themselves to such silent and unpublicised activities? Indira Gandhi, the new symbol of economic independence of the millions, must tell her colleagues and the youth again and again that they cannot win it without identifying themselves with their fellow citizens in thought, word and deed.

The Army, Navy and Air Force could throw out the aggressor and help the freedom fighters of Bangladesh to liberate their country because they were an organised, trained and disciplined force. Similarly the struggle against the powerful entrenched forces that exploit the labour of millions, requires a people's force functioning in every village and in the big and small towns. Once again, the battle has to be led by committed men and women who should know that mere patriotism is not enough, that the task of eliminating hunger, unemployment, ignorance and disease, is a



patriot's primary responsibility.

We, a handful of English educated citizens of free India are unable to establish a common wavelength with the bulk of our fellow countrymen because our life style is very different from theirs. This inhibition of communication makes ineffective efforts at national and social integration as have been attempted hitherto. We now realise that after 25 years of self-rule we have not been able to shorten the distance between ourselves and the masses. All our adventure in ideas about socialism, secularism and democracy have not been understood by those who need them most, because these ideas have not brought about visible changes. They therefore lack validity.

An anniversary such as this will not come for another quarter of a century. Will those who participate in India's 50th anniversary of freedom be able to say that our generation had accomplished the work assigned to us by history?

*Link*, August 15, 1972.

## 21. The Republic in Retrospect

REPUBLIC days have come and gone ever since the day in January 1950 when, at the final session of the Constituent Assembly Jawaharlal Nehru and the other members signed the Constitution of India. For us in the capital city of India the day has been identified with the annual parades which are both spectacular and dazzling, and in which thousands of men, women and children participate. The smart men of the Armed Forces, the gorgeous pageants from all the States, our enthusiastic youth brigades and last but not the least, our wonderful folk dancers from the hills and plains of our vast motherland stream across the avenues, roads and lanes of the city of New and Old Delhi on the 26th of January every year. Thousands upon thousands of people from the surrounding villages, towns and, of course, from every corner of this city of many millions come to see the nation at its glittering best.

It has become a day to look forward to for young and old, a national holiday on which even the unhappier sections of the people try to forget their woes and come out of the dark shadows of the slums of Delhi. But for the generation that has now stepped into the sixtieth and a few more years of their lives, the 26th of January is an occasion for recalling a very cold morning over forty years ago when on the banks of the river Ravi, Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the flag after the passing of the resolution on the declaration of complete independence by the Indian National Congress. Later, more often than not, this annual day was observed in defiance of the British authorities, involving us in many a clash with the police or military, who fired or lathi-charged on the slightest provocation.

The fact that India's chosen representatives would one day de-



clare it to be a Republic was well known, specially to the learned pundits of those times. The younger elements were not very concerned with the problem, because for them what mattered most was the driving away of the British although none of us could imagine any reordering of India after freedom on authoritarian lines. We all knew that once we had ceased to be subservient to the British Crown, India would form a government in which supreme power would reside with her elected representatives. The demand for a Constituent Assembly, deriving its authority from the people, without any external interference, was the crux of numerous resolutions, passed at conventions and conferences of the enlightened and awakened middle class intelligentsia. The history of the Congress before Independence and other militant organisations laid strewn with references to Nehru's repeated declarations that Britain must surrender its sovereignty to the people's representatives who would devise their own constitution according to the inner dynamics of revolutionary democracy.

These issues appeared to some of us somewhat academic and hypothetical because the main problem was, first and foremost, one of forging sanctions for wresting political power and combating the remnants of feudalism, the princes, and their sycophants who were the main pillars of British rule in India. Therefore, the militant Left within the Congress and outside would very often sneer at the liberal elements in it for talking of Dominion Status and the various reforms which the British condescended to bestow on India during fits of simulated generosity, so that they could split the all-class unity of the people against their stranglehold. Keeping Indians quarrelling, dividing them by pitting Hindus against Muslims, the upper castes against the lower, was a weapon which they used with considerable success. The ultimate tragedy of the Indian people as a whole lay in our inability to see through this game despite the efforts mainly of Gandhiji and Nehru, because it eventually led to the division of the country, with consequences of a disastrous nature. The after-effects of the poison they fed us persist even to this day.

Many of us had on the eve of Independence in 1946 become a "hostile" force within the Congress because we could not agree with its top leadership in permitting the British to divide the country instead of spurning their magnanimous offer to quit the

country on the condition that "Muslim India" would be allowed to have its own State and the feudal princes the "right" to choose to be with one or the other part of the country. At first the stunning news that partition had been agreed to was unbelievable. I remember going to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to demand an explanation for this decision only to be told, "Aur koi chara nahi tha" (there was no alternative). Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was then living in the old Constitution House and I was his neighbour. He wept and said, "Hamare sath dhoka hua" —we have been betrayed! Gandhiji at first was pained and shocked but when Jawaharlal Nehru explained to him that in the interest of saving the people from mass butchery, it had to be agreed to, he also finally had to yield and called on us, the Socialists in the Congress, to accept the verdict of the leaders as a lesser evil. We were in a minority and had to satisfy ourselves with making angry speeches all over the country but since the Left within and beyond the Congress was hopelessly divided in its understanding of vital national and ideological issues, we could do no more than fume and fret and subside into helplessness.

Most of us were nowhere near the constitution-making of those days. We preferred to adopt an attitude of aloofness, thoroughly disapproving the attempts by the "lawyers" to forge a Constitution which we knew could not mean the rule of the people, for them and by them, but the rule of the rich for them and by them. The Left intelligentsia was powerless and was unable to prevent the drawing up of a Constitution which in spite of its liberal accents contained all the essentials for safeguarding the interests of the rich and thus paved the way for the growth of monopolies and hegemony of the landlords in rural society. We failed to prepare the people to organise themselves for the purpose of defending their interests and educating the working class politically.

Gandhiji was not at all interested in what was being said and done in the Constituent Assembly because he was horrified and overwhelmed by the blood-letting just before and after the division of the country. His despair knew no bounds, he was agonised at the thought that his life-long experiments with non-violence as a weapon for winning just causes had failed at the very moment of victory, that his message of ahimsa had failed to prevent men from turning into cruel beasts, who spared neither the young nor old,



men, women or children frenzied by communal passions and revealing all that is mean and cowardly. His confessional speeches during the remaining weeks of his life bear witness to his agony—no less than the agony of the man who was crucified on the cross for daring to reinterpret the scriptures of the Old Testament.

Jawaharlal Nehru and a few who believed in socialism in all sincerity did their best to make some of the provisions of our Constitution flexible, so that the millions when awakened could assert their will and purge it of whatever stood in the way of their social liberation. He was quite positive even after he became the Prime Minister of India that democracy would be an empty slogan unless the masses were given the opportunity of leading lives free of want and misery.

He said: "We want our people to have greater opportunities, not only from an economic or material point of view but at other levels also. We have seen in other countries that economic growth by itself does not necessarily mean human growth or even national growth. We have to keep this in mind and also remember that the growth of a nation has little to do with the shouting to be heard in the market places and the stock exchanges of the country. So, an integrated plan for the economic growth of the country, for the growth of the individual, for greater opportunities for every individual and for the greater freedom of the country has to be drawn up and drawn up within the framework of political democracy. Political democracy will only justify itself if it ultimately succeeds in producing these results. If it does not, it will have to yield to some other kind of economic or social structure which we may or may not like. Ultimately, it is the results that decide the structure a country will adopt. When we talk of political democracy, we must remember that it no longer has the particular significance it had in the 19th century, for instance. If it is to have any meaning political democracy must gradually or if you like, rapidly lead to economic democracy. If there is economic inequality in the country, all the political democracy and all the adult suffrage in the world cannot bring about real democracy. Therefore, your objective must be to put an end to all differences between class and class, to bring about more equality and a more unitary society—in other words, to strive for economic democracy, we have to think in terms of ultimately developing into a classless society. That may still be a

far-off ideal; I do not know. But we must, nevertheless, keep it in view".

Ever since 1928 and with greater emphasis in later years he declared that a socialist democracy would be established in India. He earnestly hoped that the dominant middle class and its intelligentsia would be conscious of the advantage of industrialisation. But he was sadly mistaken in imagining that this class would also be able to rise above its petit-bourgeois traits and therefore avoid and see the pitfalls of a capitalist order in a vast country of people writhing in poverty.

Of late a very small section of this class under Indira Gandhi's leadership has begun to realise that unless the chasm between the privileged new rich class and the working millions is bridged the Republic of Nehru's dreams would collapse. They are realising that unless they mobilise elements of the entire Left spectrum into a powerful united force, reaction in many guises will usurp their power and succeed in reversing the halting steps taken so far towards a socialist world of people with equal rights and equal obligations because Democracy and Socialism have to be practised simultaneously to bring about what is being said from the many platforms and many forums.

Those who are the custodians of the future and the youth who are its inheritors cannot afford the luxury of mere ideological debates. The mere knowledge that the present climate has made the basic thoughts of scientific socialism popular is not enough. Those belonging to the socialist ranks in the Congress and elsewhere must struggle against the moral inertia that appears to have overpowered them. Opportunism can be uprooted by practising what we believe in, not just by sermonising. They must not look out for alibis for their own inadequacies and confusions.

Gandhiji and his generation and even some who preceded them were men who practised what they preached. The affluent among them sacrificed their affluence at the altar of freedom. They did not utilise their opportunities and status to amass wealth for themselves. All of them were not faultless or flawless. But by and large they suffered, physically and financially. They had the courage to abandon creature comforts and for sake many a class instinct so that the people's faith in their qualities of head and heart may inspire them to follow the path of struggle against imperialist



brigandage and oppression.

The mechanism of our democratic Constitution is somewhere at fault, otherwise why should a poor man, however patriotic and selfless, fail to find a place in our legislatures? The honest among the intelligentsia also keep away from them because they cannot muster the financial resources involved in electioneering and are therefore not 'safe' candidates. On an occasion such as this in the twentyfifth year of India's freedom from bondage—we who have eyes to see must help those blinded by power to regain their vision.

The pomp and pageantry of our Republic Day parades and festivities may be necessary but it should not lull us into complacency. The hungry and the named must not be left to their 'fate'. We shall be our brother's keeper, that should be our resolve.

---

*Link*, January 26, 1973

## 22. Gandhiji and the Days Preceding Independence

THE annual ritual of celebrations of the day on which power was transferred from the Parliament of Great Britain to India's chosen representatives seldom evokes feelings of unmixed elation to one who has lived through the days that preceded its formal declaration.

The darkest hour, the saying goes, precedes the dawn but our skies on the eve of independence were red not with the radiance of revolution but with the fiery glare of inhuman communal and counter-communal bestiality. The hidden forces of counter-revolution burst forth on our horizon and swept away every iota of human decency from the hearts and minds of its helpless victims. Their frenzied souls, fed on centuries of poisonous fanatical propaganda, fanned by the world's most cunning imperialist minds, had transformed the Indian people, Hindus and Muslims, into beasts of prey, gripped by senseless and shameful passions from the lowest depths of their degraded enslaved bodies.

Gandhiji's tireless wanderings throughout the remotest corners of the country to quench the flames of communal violence, carrying singlehanded the torch of enlightenment and the message of peace and harmony brought only temporary relief, (throughout the year and a half prior to 15 August, 1947). His passionate appeals for discipline, his plea to turn the searchlight on oneself, to purify our thoughts and prepare ourselves for the birth of freedom were unable to counter the venom spewed by the agent provocateur of reaction, specially by the leaders of the two-nation theory and their avaricious hordes of traitors. They betrayed the nation's interest by insisting on its vivisection, by using innocent human beings as fodder to feed the fire of death and destruction.



The grim happenings in Noakhali and other places in Bengal and Bihar and in the Punjab of those days have not been forgotten by the generation that was a witness to it all because those painful memories are a part of a very sad chapter of our history.

With Gandhiji's release in 1944 from his place of detention in Poona the political scene had come to life once again. The mighty mass upsurge of 1942 had subsided under the severe repression of the dying but not dead British imperialism. His magnificent words of courage and comfort soon after were beginning to dispel the depression and gloom of frustration and as World War II saw the defeat of fascism, the anti-imperialist wave rose gradually but slowly. The sagas of the Indian National Army of Subhas Chandra Bose was rousing afresh our patriotic fervour, the uprising in the Indian Navy was energising the working class and its leaders into action but, above all, after the release of Jawaharlal Nehru and his comrades from prison, India sensed that freedom at last need no longer be an unattainable dream. Churchill's defeat in the elections to the British Parliament raised hopes among the political leaders of India, specially the Congress, that the new Government of the British Labour Party would be compelled to liquidate the Empire. England had built for itself in India, leading to its ultimate withdrawal from Asia and Africa.

The visionary that Nehru was saw in all this the fulfilment of his ambition of an awakened continent and began to make preparations for an Asian Relations conference, despite the communalists' efforts to distort the concept of a free and united India. His remarkable optimism, in the face of the communal trouble brewing all over the country, emboldened him to invite (in his capacity as the Prime Minister of India's Interim Government) representatives from all the Asian countries.

The conference which was held in March 1947 and was attended by 250 delegates from all the Asian and Arab countries including representatives from Mongolia, the Soviet Asian Republic, China, Indonesia, Burma and others. The scenes of that glittering gathering assembled in the historic Purana Qila—our "old fort"—are unforgettable, specially the moment when those invitees rose in ovation after the Father of the Nation had spoken to them: "I would not like to live in this world if it is not to be one world. I would certainly like to see that dream realized in my life."

time... If you work with a fixed determination there is no doubt that in our own generation we will realise this dream". But Gandhiji did not gloss over what was ugly on his own soil. In his usual self-inspective manner he confessed that they had come to India at a time when it was harassed by fratricidal strife. "We do not know how to keep peace among ourselves. We think we must resort to the law of the jungle. India is on the eve of independence. We want to be our own masters. But how shall we be our own masters? I do not know; I am sure Pandit Nehru does not know, I am sure Khan Saheb (Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan) does not know. All that we know is that one should do one's duty..." Further on, with his characteristic frankness he said, "You, friends, have not seen real India, and you are not meeting in conference in the midst of real India. The big cities are not the real India. The carnage which you see going on in various parts of India is certainly a shameful thing. But you are greatly mistaken and you will only mislead others if you go away with the impression that you have seen real India when you have visited a few big cities of India. If you really want to see India, it is to be found not in her dozen or so big cities but in the 700,000 villages where dwell thirty-eight crores of India's population—miserable specimens of humanity with lustreless eyes."

In the months that followed Gandhiji's loud thinking on the Asian Relations Conference about his and his comrades' uncertainties of the manner in which India would attain freedom were becoming clearer. The conspiracy to undermine the firmly-held conviction by every section of patriotic Indians that the British and their camp-followers would never be permitted to compartmentalise India on the absurdly illogical basis of two separate Hindu and Muslim states resulted in the notorious Direct Action Movement of mob violence, arson and terror leading to civil strife in all the vulnerable regions. Undaunted, those who could not contemplate the very thought of a partitioned country, carried on their campaign against the acceptance of the British offer to "Divide and Quit". Gandhiji soon discovered that the 'realist' friends in the "Interim Government" had no alternative but to submit to the circumstances created by our benevolent "liberators"—the charming Mountbattens. They were not prepared to go back again to the 'wilderness' under the Gandhian leadership because they genuinely believed that the opportunity



of getting rid of the British had to be seized here and now. It might be the last one for a transition from slavery to freedom without bloodshed because the war had shaken the very foundations of the Raj and its hour of weakness may not last very long. Gandhiji tried his best, on the one hand, to argue the leadership of the Congress out of this understanding and on the other persuade Mountbatten that the "noblest act of the British nation" should be performed irrespective of our internal differences.

Gandhiji's magnanimity lay in his capacity to understand and persuade those who did not pay lip-service to his ideal of non-violence. In those crucial weeks before he finally submitted to the creation of Pakistan as a pre-condition to Independence, he gave them an opportunity to state their case.

I remember clearly the talks my colleagues in the Quit India struggle and I had with him on this question, because it was agitating us greatly. He expressed frankly his helplessness to prevent the division of the country. He said he did not agree to the Congress being a party to the demand for partition of the country, that he was prepared for a situation in which the British could even hand over power to the Muslim League because its wrong policies could easily be resisted "non-violently".

We pleaded with him to stop the trend towards 'collaboration' with the British because only he could do so, that "we" were with him on this vital issue, that "the whole country" would support him, etc. But he replied, "I would love to have you with me if you agree with my analyses. You and those over whom you have influence should join me in preparing the atmosphere for non-violence in the country". He, however, candidly confessed that he had doubts whether the "42 group" would "abjure the doctrine that the end justifies the means" and since the Congress was also not prepared to agree with him, "I am left to plough my lonely furrow". He thought well of us, he had openly said so on many an occasion and paid what I think were undeserving tributes to us "for playing with our lives" but he had also said that "you will have to cultivate the higher courage of dying without killing... If you cast in your lot with me, I shall call every one of you top-rankers to defy death with me... I own no party. But you will be my party. Long before you were born I was a Socialist. You are armchair socialists... I have therefore only one thing to say to you: carry to its ultimate

conclusion the fearlessness which characterised you in 1942. Now is the time and the hour. If you let it slip away it may never return...."

Intoxicated by the new-found "glory" of '42 and the exuberance of our spirits, Gandhiji's solemn appeal fell on fallow ground, and he trailed off either into the armchair variety of socialists or began a quest for a scientific socialist path which turned out to be no more than an escape into smugness and futile sloganizing verbosity, a wandering away from the men and women of the soil.

Therefore, the thoughts that are uppermost in the mind of individuals like me cannot be other than regretful. We failed to rise to the need of the hour and became helpless witnesses to tragic happenings both before and after the Union Jack ceased to fly over India on the 15th of August, twenty-six years ago.

---

Perinet, August 16, 1973.



## 23. Towards An Era of Peace, A New Order

FIFTEEN years constitute no more than a speck in the spectrum of history, but for those who belong to the fraternity of men and women sharing a common vision of social change on the universal plane, this decade and a half of our history has been significant for several reasons.

To them the post-freedom decade from 1947 to 1957 was a period of intense mind and heart-searching, because none was prepared for the backlash of reaction that overtook free India immediately after its independence. The comprehension that we were no longer colonial slaves had hardly taken root when the nation was subjected to successive onslaughts leading to the division of the country and agonising misery to millions, culminating in the martyrdom of Gandhiji, the liberator. The aftermath of freedom, therefore, was not the rosy dawn of our imagination but a grim nightmare, overwhelming us with baffling problems, creating confusion rather than clarity regarding our objectives and the means to achieve them.

Our lack of preparedness immediately after independence for resisting the evils embedded in the long era of subjugation caught us totally unprepared and incapable of understanding the forces that breed reaction. Nor were we immediately aware of the emergence of neocolonialist conspiracies in the ruling circles of Western Europe and a new phenomenon in the post-war world, namely, that the driving force of imperialism had shifted and crossed the Atlantic, to make the U.S.A. its centre.

The "Left" core of the freedom struggle therefore was quite confused and bewildered with the result that it lacked the ideological

cohesion necessary for organising the masses afresh for meeting the challenge of local and international reaction adequately. The socialist Congressmen of these years did attempt to provide a theoretical base to our thinking processes but their programme and understanding were essentially "social democratic," a carbon copy of the British Labour Party's outlook and therefore they adopted fiercely anti-Soviet and anti-Communist attitude. Sponsoring the cold war logic of monopoly capitalism, our socialist friends could not convince the as yet un-contaminated Congress "Left" that the Soviet Union was a "totalitarian" military power menacing the flowering of national social democracies in countries which, according to them, were liberated by the Western allies from the grip of Nazi fascism. They either tried to ignore the role of the Soviet Union in the anti-fascist war, or developed the theory that its emergence as a strong military power was full of dangers for the free democracies of Europe, America and elsewhere.

Had the learned Acharya Narendra Deva remained free of this interpretation of Communist movements in the world and resisted attempts to raise the bogey that world peace would be threatened once again by the Soviet totalitarian dictatorship, he could have given the radical forces of the post-'42 years a correct lead. More so, had Jawaharlal Nehru enough time to personally guide and organise the Left, specially the younger elements, he could have prevented it from drifting into the arms of cold war enthusiasts. He alone could have persuaded the younger elements of those times to remain in the Congress framework and provide it with a disciplined socialist cadre. Equally, if the radical Congress elements who had led and organised the mass upheavals of '42 and later, had been less impatient and better acquainted with Jawaharlal Nehru's realistic understanding of the world beyond India, they need not have wandered away from his moorings. His realistic and farsighted understanding that in the struggle against imperialism the Communist movement led by the Soviet Union was an ally of progressive forces in their struggle for independence and social justice in Asia and other countries, would have prevented us from remaining rudderless. Thus the progressive elements in India could have become a powerful factor by now in stemming the tide of reaction at home and elsewhere.

Further, Nehru's hands would then have been strengthened as



against those of his colleagues who saw in him a dreamy-eyed socialist visionary who, if not restrained sufficiently, might give the new Indian State and its economy a Communist orientation. Nehru never concealed his intense dislike for the manifestations of the capitalist way of life and his frank approval of Lenin's interpretation of Communist theory as practised in post-Czarist Russia, hence the apprehensions of his senior comrades and colleagues that he would accommodate in India's parliamentary form of democracy a Marxist view of the ideal society.

These "ifs" and "buts" of history will always haunt us because we have missed a historic opportunity to grow into a source of strength for our impoverished peasants and workers by failing to organise and discipline the truly revolutionary classes, after the defeat of British imperialism in 1947.

For many of us the decade after independence was a period of quest and a search for a new theoretical base rooted in the facts of Indian history and social tradition. We knew almost instinctively that to be an effective force that could overcome the hidden forces of reaction and its ugly consequences, a socio-political movement must have a scientifically sound frame of reference, and therefore made honest efforts to secure the leadership necessary for inspiring us to think afresh and act in terms of existing realities. However it was quite obvious that revolutionary changes in a complex society such as ours cannot be brought about by merely annihilating what is harmful. What is bad has to be replaced with what is beneficial, and serious attempts have to be made to identify the cause that have undermined the fabric of India's economy to facilitate the task of a relentless struggle to bring the new out of the old. It was quite some time before we gave up the mistaken belief that there is virtue in creating conditions of chaos. We realised that if chaos leads to fundamental change then it is good, but if it leads to counter-revolutionary upheavals it is not merely harmful but criminal to call upon people to indulge in anarchic acts of destruction.

All this and more went into the thoughts and feelings of a fairly large number of people after the first ten years of total independence. We found ourselves at the proverbial cross-roads and had to decide upon the next step in the journey towards the new society of our dreams. A great deal of fresh thinking had to be under-

taken if we were to avoid the earlier pitfalls. To steer clear of the beaten tracks that lead to power after a victorious struggle is a fairly hazardous venture. Also, mere idealism if practised in ivory towers can be nothing more than a delightful individual pastime, refreshing and sometimes quite exciting. When the enthusiasm that carries people through a revolutionary struggle in a revolutionary situation fades out, the capacity to live a life of hardship, to adhere to the discipline of the battle-front, to be fearless and brave cannot be sustained.

Once the upsurge subsides and all appears to be well on the surface and the people who need urgent changes are lulled into apathy by born of frustration, it requires mental, moral and intellectual effort to analyse the new situation and shun superficial generalisations, and plan for a fresh effort. To accept a simplified view of life, national and international, is to take the easy way out, but to examine the real reasons that cause national stagnation and moral collapse requires considerable detachment and total identification with the bulk of the masses living within one's national frontiers.

For us in India, choosing the directions that would lead the people to their goal of happiness, peace and prosperity was not a simple task when the second decade after independence began. The global ideological and political confrontation between the imperialist and socialist powers led to a critical situation, from 1957 onwards; the attention of vast numbers of people of our country was drawn to the happenings in both the worlds. The strange behaviour of the Chinese leadership towards its friends and neighbours added to the general bewilderment. The glamorous achievements of affluent USA and the Western powers belonging to its orbit succeeded in mesmerising the Indian elite by its lavish riches, the glittering civilization and (comparatively speaking) the general well-being of even the common working people there. Their tremendous scientific and technological capacities magnetised our young intelligentsia and they saw the realisation of their own private utopias in the models set by U.S.A., West Germany and others under American tutelage. They were completely convinced that only in a world of "free enterprise" can one be freed from the degradation of poverty. A democracy in which an individual could amass the good things of life was for them the only viable remedy



for pulling India out of the depths of hunger and squalor, because it gave an equal opportunity to all "rich" and "poor" alike, to get what they could.

The slogan of "saving the world from Communism" appealed to this elite because their understanding of the latter meant a life of drudgery and drabness, dull regimentation of one's faculties and sensibilities, an egalitarian order where the urges of their particular class would be suppressed and subordinated to the ideal of the greatest good of the greatest number. They were prepared to listen to any and every prejudiced argument against every aspect of the new socialist societies in the USSR, Eastern Europe and (until recently) in China. They were completely convinced that our salvation lay in adopting the American way of life and looked down on anti-imperialist movements and their leaders with contemptuous condescension. Everything that went wrong in the Indian economy was ascribed to Nehru's illusions about the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, his encouragement to those who indulged in unrealistic talk of world peace and socialism, his anger against the monopolists and his deliberate opposition to joining the camp of the USA's vast military bloc. The communists and their fellow-travellers in this period were either objects of fear or ridicule; they were looked upon as traitors, not patriots, mere stooges and agents of the Soviet Union and others belonging to the "totalitarian" camp. This new elite logic (widely prevalent in our universities and the bureaucracy) was based entirely on the thesis that the technological and scientific revolution in the West had made all other modes of economy outdated, that Marxism was no longer a valid basis for revolutionary changes in society and that the millennium for all times and all people had been brought about by the marvels of America's great achievements and its mighty power.

When, however, these short-sighted sections of Westernised and Americanised Indians learnt that science and technology was not a monopoly concern of their patrons, that in the Communist country of the USSR the space era had begun, that its nuclear capacity could match that of the USA and its allies, they began to have a second look at the world and doubts began to bother them about their earlier assumptions. Their understanding about the other half of the globe, i.e., where the Socialist powers and the pro-

ple of Asia, Africa and Latin America were engaged in struggle for liberation from American domination, became less myopic. This peculiarly aberrant class was taken aback by the thought that the next war could not merely devastate the dreaded Communist world but possibly mankind itself, despite the vast protection that the American umbrella gave to its clients.

Their cynicism about the capacity of the Vietnamese people to liberate their country from America's vicious war of aggression gradually disappeared and they did not scoff any more at the poor "ideologues" who insisted that American or any other imperialism can be defeated, provided the peoples of the regions subjected to armed aggression were united and determined to die rather than surrender to the enemy. Assistance from the socialist countries, specially the USSR had been assumed to be negligible in comparison with what the puppet regimes obtained from the aggressors and therefore their stunning discomfiture knew no limits, when Vietnam forced the USA to surrender.

The tide however has turned, specially during the last five years. Now, those who refused to see in American and Western civilisation the panacea for backward countries like ours can with modest pride claim that we were not so incorrect in our understanding of the facts of life. The balance of forces, as the world understands this expression, has altered in favour of concepts that previously seemed to be irrelevant. World peace, coexistence of nations and countries in different stages of social evolution, non-alignment and the fact that if a people are led by a dedicated and principled leadership they can overcome the mightiest combination of forces ranged against them, are accepted as inevitable. The recent truce between aggressive imperialism and peace-loving Communism, the desire for mutual cooperation between peoples, whatever their beliefs, the respect for national frontiers, the belief that a nuclear war is no longer on the agenda of aggressive imperialism have been justified by recent developments in human history. The Brezhnev-Nixon agreements, Washington's acceptance of Communist China in the UN, the victory of the Vietnamese people and the people of Bangladesh over their oppressors, the realisation that Socialist Cuba cannot be vanquished, the emergence of the German Democratic Republic as an independent Socialist state have proved beyond doubt that war-mongering circles



in USA and the West have learnt a lesson.

These developments have also convinced honest people that wherever the liberation forces are inspired by progressive ideas of socialist revolution they become invincible. A fundamental change has taken place in the world and therefore the soil on which the evil seeds of the colonial era flourished has changed its composition for all time to come, and a new age for the future of those who are determined to preserve their independence in every sense of the term has arrived.

But while the days of political and military confrontation and military pressures have receded into the background wherever the people have challenged these forces unitedly and fearlessly, in regions like ours and in West Asia, etc., the believers in the might of militarism are seeking new fields of operation. Asian security like European security has to become a reality if this menace is to be overcome. The arrogant postures of the affluent cannot frighten the unarmed workers and peasants of the hitherto exploited countries which were dominated by the "master" races of the West. It should henceforth be easier for disinherited and oppressed masses to resist their oppressors and their satellites.

The grim era of domination by the world's affluent powers over the more vulnerable sections of humanity in Asia and elsewhere is coming to an end and it should give us all a justifiable sense of satisfaction. Even so it must not lead those, who have still to go a long way, into the stifling corridors of complacency and lethargy. Our goal of the fullest satisfaction of the people's material and cultural requirements, a social environment that gives the lowliest individual all the facilities he needs for his individual development are as yet distant dreams. We must not forget that improvements, reforms, and radical institutional changes in our respective regions can be brought about not by mouthing slogans and propagating abstract theories. The lesson of history is that for several reasons people in the so-called underdeveloped areas had in years gone by ceased to be vigilant.

To build a society of free human beings, we need to be alert once again and resolve afresh to rededicate ourselves to our social and moral requirements. A new generation of nation-builders must come forward to resist the many temptations that power brings in its wake, shun pride of office and abstain from indulging in extrav-

gant luxuries so that they may evoke the respect and admiration of their fellow countrymen. These exhortations will sound trite to many and even pontifical. But if we want the masses of our people to respond to those who want to lead them, they cannot escape these compulsions. Human beings in the closing years of the 20th century can no longer be treated as pawns in the power-political game.

As we come to the end of the fifteenth year of this journal's publication, we cannot help repeating that none but the people of India and their chosen leaders can bring about the changes for which former generations struggled and suffered all manner of hardships. They can take full advantage of the new discoveries of scientific knowledge and experience of other countries. But the pace and momentum of their march towards a just, humane and progressive order will depend on the quality and quantity of their own efforts. History has once again given numerous example of the age-old truth that a people's salvation lies in its own effort, its own conviction that theirs is a just cause. The India of tomorrow has enormous potentialities for redeeming the oft-repeated pledge that we shall remain free and it is only by being true to ourselves, can we as a people emerge victorious.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1973.



civil disobedience movements petered out for want of mass momentum.

Besides, religious and communal conflicts often flared up as the ruling power of those times used every occasion to encourage them, so that our united struggles against its regime could be diverted into negative channels. However, India's freedom was wrested from the British only after we had agreed to pay the price they demanded—pound of flesh they insisted upon was given when literally countless human beings butchered one another after the country was torn asunder. Pakistan was born as a result of that meaningless bargain. Indians whether Muslim, Sikh or Hindu, were seized by uncontrollable frenzy brother killing brother and destroying the age-old fabric of a secular and multi-dimensional society.

It is with this background of fratricidal fanaticism in mind that India's independence day is celebrated, unlike in other countries which celebrate their freedom in a spirit of gay abandon. What followed soon after, was to further drown the people in horror, anguish and sorrow. Within a few months, the nation paid the ultimate price for its folly when Gandhiji was assassinated, staining the free flag of India with the blood of the greatest Indian of the age. These traumatic experiences are a part of our memory of a time when instead of jubilation we were depressed and ashamed for what had happened, an inglorious end to what ought to have been a triumphant chapter in our history.

Such, according to me, are the reasons for the lack of feelings of joy and jubilation on an otherwise memorable day connoting the emergence of an oppressed people into freedom.

This year of all years has been for us a year of unusual gloom and as we observe once again the sombre rituals associated with Independence Day our thoughts fly back to the years that have gone by. There appear to be valid reasons why we should feel burdened with anxiety and concern. The hardships and difficulties of the people in times of natural calamity apart, what is quite incomprehensible to one and all is the steady erosion of their means of livelihood. It is not only the vast army of unemployed who are of course denied the means to earn but even those who are fortunate enough to be at work are unable to do more than eke out their days in conditions of acute economic distress. According to the current

## 24. Anguish, Triumph and Hope

WE greet the day annually on which the declaration of our independence was announced. Twenty-seven years ago on the stroke of midnight Jawaharlal Nehru declared that India had severed her bonds of slavery. There was more solemnity than gaiety on the very first day of independence and this tradition continues even to this day. The scenes India witnessed in that momentous period, the birth of a new India, are unforgettable. The transfer of total power from the British to the Indian people was a historic act of abdication by the mightiest imperialist power of those times and an eventful day in the life of our nation. We need to remind ourselves of the past when reacting to events of present day.

Equally important is it to know that freedom was not ushered in smoothly and peacefully even if in the final stages it appeared to be a cold-blooded constitutional change of hands. The post-independent generation is invariably under the impression that we gained our liberty in a uniquely peaceful manner and it was a mere matter of jail-going for the few and that freedom came as a benevolent act on the part of those who held away over India for almost a century and a half. Fierce struggles, armed and unarmed insurrectionary upheavals, the sacrifice and heroism of many generations of Indians, since 1857 finally led the British to surrender their dominant role, on August 15, 1947. Naturally non-violent methods were largely responsible for rousing the millions to action under Gandhiji's supreme command. It was good that it was so, because the failure of other methods of struggle before his arrival on the scene had lulled India into apathy and despair; nevertheless even after Gandhiji took over the reins there were periods of stormy militancy specially whenever the non-cooperation and



terminology the curse that has settled on our soil is known as inflation. This diseased state of our economy threatens to extinguish all our hopes and aspirations for a life free of care and concern for one's daily bread. The minimum needs of vast numbers are no longer within their reach and whatever the explanation, the platitudes about a silver lining behind every cloud refuse to satisfy the hungry and the destitute.

Have we arrived at the present state of affairs because "the ship of state" is rudderless? Jawaharlal Nehru, the very first to pilot it, was aware that he had inherited an old ship, built for purposes of exploitation and coercion. He was keen to rebuild it from scratch to suit the needs of a country freed from alien domination, growing under bureaucratic rules and regulations. Had he succeeded in refashioning the state structure that he had envisaged for India (after her liberation), may be the old trappings and framework would have been by now cast away. But such was the compulsion of the powerful classes who stepped into power that Nehru was forced to retain much that was obsolete and which obstructed the development of socialism and a steady growth of economic prosperity of the people. The efforts of his status quo-minded colleagues succeeded and he could not prevent them from making the constitution of free India a pale imitation of an exploitative order of society. He repeatedly reminded the Constituent Assembly that India's freedom would be meaningless if it could not bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasant and workers of India, and give them the sinews to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease. He raised his voice often and often, to bring home to the constitution-makers that they must take care to enshrine such principles in the constitution as would "bring fulness of life to every man and woman to ensure that they acquire equal rights, privileges and obligations". Throughout his stewardship he assured his people whose boundless confidence and affection he enjoyed that they must wage a war against poverty (the only sort of war permissible), by working hard and by their labour and sacrifice mould a new life for themselves. He urged upon those invested with responsibility to be vigilant and unswerving in their determination to give of their best to the service of their people, to lift the lowly to their rightful place in society.

But no single individual, however tall his stature, can work for

the fulfilment of his ideals, unless he has the dedicated support of those who say they follow him. While the interests of the masses were dear to him personally the same could not be said of the men and women who professed loyalty to his leadership. His abhorrence for all that goes under the label of an acquisitive society is well known and his repeated warning that wealth should not be concentrated in the hands of the few, his ardent pleadings that it was only in a socialism-oriented society that the world could make progress, fell on deaf ears. Men and women who could share his lofty aims were wanting, or had drifted away from him. He could not thus find it humanly possible to rebuild the Congress into a socialist organisation. The effort to do so is continuing but there is not as yet any sign that it will succeed.

Hence the concept of parliamentary democracy has remained very largely ineffective in bringing about any structural changes in the ownership and distribution pattern of our economy. The step by step gradualism which was meant to renovate society has not yielded results. History is witness to the fact that revolutionary changes cannot be brought about through mere legislative measures. All such experiments in countries situated as ours was and is, have failed to bring about the progressive well-being of those who work and do not live by profit. Partial changes may come about and sometimes it appears as if social reform will achieve a social revolution, but our own experience proves that it has led us by and large into stagnation. It is obvious now that an economy based on the principles of private profit when mixed with a section only under public ownership leads to the former gaining ground over the latter. All the efforts which have been and are being made by Mrs Indira Gandhi are well-intentioned and meant to overcome the obstacles. But, functioning as it does, the present state structure even after twenty-seven long years is totally unsuited to further the purposes of a planned welfare state, much less a state in which the working people have the right to claim their legitimate share of the products of their labour.

Whether it is a "management problem" or the absence of honest and committed individuals, it is the rejection of the values that flow from an equalitarian order by people who are in actual control of the levers or of the state machine, that is largely responsible for our present plight.



Brooding by itself or mere regrets cannot yield solutions. Let us confess that the values of the earlier era of national fervour and the spirit of effacing oneself in the larger cause of freedom have ceased to be relevant to the new intelligentsia, the youth. They alone can and should provide a dynamic yet constructive leadership at the present stage of our history. Most of us who had acquired certain intellectual, moral and humanitarian values from the late twenties onwards, known as ideological categories, find ourselves outdated. Some among the old become angry and frustrated but the old remedies they offer is like old wine being poured into new bottles. Such nostrums as they bring forth are regarded as moth-eaten ideas by younger men and women. The latter have never had the opportunity that Nehru and his kind had in their youth. Superficially educated and rootless, even intelligent young men and women (with rare exceptions) are growing cynical about the past. They have no desire to study the facts of life, to apply their minds to the tasks that they alone can perform because their upbringing has been incoherently planned.

Translating a dream, into action to work for a total change, needs men and women of vision and courage and integrity. When such individuals emerge and I am convinced that later if not sooner they will appear, the next phase of Indian renaissance will find its pioneers. If history is any guide a new leadership cannot be long in evolving out of the present state of confusion and chaos. The older generation of men in politics should ponder on their failures and try not to impose their ineffectual strivings on fresh and turbulent minds. The latter have to learn from our mistakes and search their hearts and minds and give the country and its people what they need most — clarity of aims and objects and the will to achieve them. The future will not remain as dark as it is today. With faith in themselves and the millions who live in misery, mature minds must come forward and look for the means to attain unity of purpose. The working class has to attain greater maturity if it wants to liberate itself and free itself from its shackles.

---

*Patriot*, August 15, 1974.

## 25. 1975—A New Tryst?

QUITE obviously Independence Day of 1975 will be qualitatively different from the one that we observed last year. The "tryst" with destiny in 1947 had indeed been accomplished but trysts, as we know are merely the beginning of a new world of relationships, a fulfilment that is never an end in itself.

The nation was not in a mood of elation on last year's Independence Day because it was experiencing difficulties which had made life for the average man and woman extremely burdensome. Why, therefore, it may well be asked should they, only one year later not be more depressed? Are there any valid reasons for throwing off the near despair that overtook them last year? Have unemployment, the high cost of living, problems of housing and health and other essential facilities become matters of a bitter past? We are well aware that these minimum conditions for a life free of anxieties have yet to be realised and nor are they realisable in the span of a mere one year. However, it is a fact that today the sense of uncertainty and hardships has been replaced by a feeling of optimistic expectation. Everyone knows that something has changed, there is something new that has emerged on the national scene.

The backdrop to this year's Independence Day is different not merely because of the declaration of the National Emergency on June 26 but primarily because of Indira Gandhi's firm and categorical affirmation of the desire to utilise it for giving democracy a new content and meaning. The new economic programme announced soon after the Emergency has once again infused all men and women who live by the sweat of their brow and toil hard for long hours with the hope that the chains that bind them will at



last be loosened. It was with a long sigh of relief that the people of India heard Indira when she spoke of the many concrete steps the Government and administration was determined to take. And although there was nothing startlingly new in the present programme of action, the fact that stern pre-emptive measures were taken instantly convinced them that these assurances were not vote-catching gimmicks but seriously meant statements requiring an earnest effort to redeem old pledges.

The reaction of the masses has also not been just an exhibition of wordy demonstrations and frothy enthusiasm. A heartening feature of the present Emergency is that our people have matured and are beginning to give up the attitude of irresponsibility. Organized sections of the people in towns and villages all those who work and administer, have realised that they also must contribute their quota of extra effort in terms of efficient and disciplined functioning and resolve never to miss this opportunity to share national tasks in a spirit of patriotism and high endeavour. They are slowly understanding that changes in the social order cannot be brought about by the old pre-independence attitude of dependence on a "ma-baap" sarkar. Leaders of public opinion should carry the message that popularly elected governments and the people have to co-operate all along the line in the task of eradicating poverty and inequality.

One does not need to recapitulate the events from 1973 to June 26, 1975 that have inevitably led to the present totally new and invigorating developments. For months together, an atmosphere of chaotic disorder was created by mobilising all the tools used by reactionary elements everywhere to challenge duly elected organs of power in the States and at the Centre. A situation of confrontation was deliberately built up in the belief that a weakened administration would aid and abet anarchic disturbances. But the plans and machinations to seize power through violence, assassinations and upheavals did not succeed beyond a point. The disgruntled leadership of a combination of defeated men should have known better than to imagine that acute as the people's economic distress was, they would refuse to be drawn into a counter-revolutionary game of power politics. The majority of the people of India may be illiterate but they are imbued with that most essential human trait, common sense.

The handful of tired old men who thought they were resurrecting the 1942 Quit India struggle against the British had been tested, tried and found out. Not one of them, individually or collectively, had coherent plans for initiating drastic changes in our social structure nor were they known to be symbols of incorruptibility and lofty idealism. Living in glass houses themselves, casting stones and hurling abuses at their opponents was unbecoming and therefore no one was truly impressed. Traditional India-baiters were the only beneficiaries of their fulminations.

A pseudo-Gandhian stalwart belonging to this motley group of counter-revolutionaries made himself more than ridiculous when he called upon the Indian army and police to disobey the orders of a constitutionally legal Government. A friend has rightly recalled how Gandhiji did not espouse the cause of the Garhwali soldiers at Peshawar—in the pre-freedom days in NWFP. Gandhiji had no hesitation in declaring (despite the criticism from radicals) that, "A soldier who disobeys an order to fire breaks the oath which he has taken and renders himself guilty of criminal disobedience. I cannot ask officials and soldiers to disobey; for when I am in power, I shall in all likelihood make use of those same officials and those same soldiers. If I taught them to disobey I should be afraid that they might do the same when I am in power".

These are some of the major causes that have alerted and awakened some of those at the highest levels of decision-making. In fact they have been jolted after months and months of political drift, casualness, and lethargy in performing the tasks they had pledged to accomplish after their massive successes in 1971 and later. The collective known as the Congress thought that Indira Gandhi was solely responsible for fulfilling the solemn pledges. Perhaps they felt that since she alone could command the truest affection and respect of the people, the duty to implement the promises made to them in 1971-72 was hers alone. The onerous burden of the State, in its entirety may have been shared by Indira Gandhi's colleagues, but this did not produce results to match the hard work, mental and physical, she had to undertake without respite.

Every crisis, internal and external, had to be faced ultimately by her in spite of the fact that the Congress as a political organisation has its roots far and wide. Discussions and differenc-



es among different sections of Congressmen are inevitable in a situation calling for dynamic action. But they need not have reached the dimensions they did and thus facilitated the birth of a peculiar type of gangster opposition to the Congress which did everything to exploit its weaknesses and shortcomings. But for this fact, the economic and social conditions after 1972 could have improved in spite of all that had taken place on the West European and international plane and which had led to inflation and its disastrous consequences here in India. But these are matters that need no longer disturb us. Fortunately, the Congress is today led by a man of farsighted understanding of the emerging situation.

In the climate created by the "Emergency"—I would rather re-define the term as Normalcy—we can now take a fresh look at everything from scratch. Gone are the inhibitions that made the law-makers falter at every step while thinking of radicalising the economy and of freeing themselves from the stranglehold of outdated constitutional straitjackets and from conventions born in Anglo-Saxon legislatures and other relics of out-of-date political norms that hamper parliamentary democracy. Those who can think for themselves can now re-examine every aspect of present-day realities and ask themselves frank questions about the validity of a purely capitalist economy when the national goal of socialism has been endorsed by the nation, again and again, over those 27 years and discussed even in earlier times.

The new order we have been dreaming of has yet to materialise. The hostile forces have not been uprooted. They were given too long a rope. Active cadres have to be vigilant about their plans to sabotage and undermine our peoples' will even in its rudimentary forms. The masses in the country alone can ultimately bring about a permanent transformation of rural and urban society and not those who exploit them in one way or another. For all this and more the recent decisions of our Parliament have laid the foundations. None of the forces that could freely obstruct the process can any longer do so with impunity. Some enemies of the people are however at large and need to be watched.

Convinced and dedicated believers in a socially just society of men and women have the opportunity now to operate freely from the tehsil upwards to the apex structures of Government and administration. The institutional changes and reforms that have

been debated in seminars and symposia by brilliant young men and women can now come down from the heights if they start mobilising and organising the as yet politically inert sections of the people. Inertia can be dispelled easily now because those who live by their convictions can isolate populist demagogues by acting and not talking only.

The world at large has in many ways entered the zone of peace and plenty. India can also throw off all that had shackled her will to move forward. Years and years ago Jawaharlal Nehru, the visionary, had said "In India...we find a struggle today between the old nationalist ideology and the new economic ideology. Most of us have grown under the nationalist tradition and it is hard to give up the mental habits of a life-time. And yet we realise that this outlook is inadequate; it does not fit in with the existing conditions in our country or in the world. There is a hiatus, a lag. We try to bridge this hiatus but the process of crossing over to a new ideology is always a painful one. Many of us are confused and perplexed today because of this. But the crossing has to be made, unless we are to remain in a stagnant water, overwhelmed from time to time by the wash of the boats that move down the river of progress"

This is no time for sceptics or cynics. This is not 1942 when we were deprived of our leaders, suddenly. The young men and women in their thirties today need not "Do or Die." All they have to do is, "To Do."

Thirty-three years ago many thousands had risen in revolt. They were groping in the dark because of a lack of adequate and well-thought out plans of action, experience and academic education. Today our universities pour out graduates in their thousands. The governments at the Centre and in the States are elected by a vast electorate. The Planning Commission has been at work for nearly two decades. A national ideology defining social justice has laid certain guidelines for action. What then is preventing them from going to the people in every nook and corner of the country to organise the people in their millions? This is a moment for deep thought and reflection. The year 1975 should become a watershed in our history.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1975.



## 26. Thirty Years of Freedom

ON this special Anniversary of our Independence, let us first think of the three decades that preceded the final emergence of India as a sovereign nation. Those thirty years were filled with patient struggles (although spasmodic) against a mighty alien power that had held India in bondage for well over a century.

The three decades prior to August 15, 1947 were a very vital period in the long history of our awakening. The realisation that we Indians were not masters of our land had dawned gradually on the new elitist class all over the country from the early years of this century. But as is well known, it represented a microscopic minority, confined to westernised affluent families, who though intellectually well equipped were concerned only about their narrow interests, and quite unaware of the conditions in which the toiling masses lived. Had Gandhiji not arrived on the scene when he did, the freedom movement could never have reached the heights of militant mass awakening and the struggles that followed against their oppressors.

The magnificent personality of Gandhiji had a magical effect on the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, inspiring them with faith and courage, telling us all in simple and unsophisticated terms that without suffering, sacrifice and sincerity of purpose, freedom from foreign rule was an impossibility. What astonished us was the fact that a single individual's pilgrimage—like journeys to every nook and corner of our land brought us together, giving all of us the feeling of oneness, of being Indian and a people who were throbbing with a common desire to become a free nation. Our language, religion and customs differed from region to region but they did not deflect us from the path he had chalked

out. It would not be correct to suggest that there were never any conflicts among the leaders or others during the many phases of our resistance campaigns. But these were, essentially, in the nature of family quarrels. It was only the imperialists' weapon of making brother fight brother that had instigated communal differences, and this caused setbacks in certain phases of the fight against them. However, sooner or later, the gentle healing words of the humble person that Gandhiji was, smoothened out the differences and for a while convinced our people that once united in thought and action, we could become invincible. But soon there were lapses into frenzy even though in times of extreme repression they rallied together.

These are reflections on a chapter in our history of times when whatever we did gave value and meaning to our lives. Under the guidance of a rare person who was a unique phenomenon in our part of the world, we who were emasculated by foreign aggression over the centuries, achieved our freedom. And yet again it was in free India that Gandhiji the liberator was assassinated by one of us, a ghastly end to a glorious chapter in Indian history.

However, even before this tragedy a sense of gloom had settled over the country owing to the fratricidal killings prior to the actual date on which the Britishers were to depart. To make things worse the vivisection of our country which seemed an impossibility almost till the day when the nation's leaders set their seal on that fateful decision, bewildered and angered the people and waves of shock engulfed the country. The socialists amongst us and indeed every secular minded Indian experienced overwhelming sorrow and despair because we had always assumed that whatever the compromises that the British negotiators might extract at the negotiating table the partition of India would never be agreed to—the stunning announcement by the leaders that there was no other alternative to civil war turned many of us into helpless spectators. The leftists in the Congress were forced to realise that since a section of our people misled by communalists could not be rallied under a united leadership, this fatal blow was inevitable. Gandhiji's sorrowful appeal to his countrymen not to reject the "Mountbatten Plan" at the memorable AICC session held in Delhi could not be spurned because we knew that unless he led us, we would not be able to revive the earlier revolutionary spirit of



the masses. His lonely wanderings away from the Capital when the flag of free India was being unfurled on the ramparts of the Red Fort was a touching proof of his agonised soul.

The fury that engulfed the Indian continent for some weeks after the 15th of August 1947 proved that ours was merely a partial victory and that future generations would condemn us for having failed to rise in revolt against the tottering empire of Great Britain. However, soon after, the climax of disaster was reached on the 30th of January 1948, the day on which Gandhiji's frail body and lacerated soul ceased to breathe.

Such haunting memories therefore make it difficult to recall the brighter aspect of the 30 years that have elapsed since then. The new State settled down gradually to the hard tasks under dedicated, experienced and talented men with Jawaharlal Nehru at the helm. He roused the people out of the depression that pervaded after the division of India. His stirring speeches and tireless efforts to refashion Asian history raised India's stature in the eyes of the world. More than anyone else Jawaharlal Nehru was aware that after the fascist defeat the world had reached a turning point and that India was destined to shoulder both its global and national responsibilities with vigour and self-confidence. But for his far-sightedness and belief in a socialist oriented world order living in peace, our Constitution may not have been given its guiding principle, namely that India must strive so that Indians who are exploited by entrenched interests, shall regain their rights and live as free and equal citizens of a modern progressive country. Nehru's commitment to a world free of military blocs and his passionate disapproval of imperialism in its old and new forms re-deemed in some measure our prestige in world forums and the humiliation we had to suffer because of what happened after we attained independence was overcome.

And now, as the country steps into its 31st year since freedom, disturbing questions confront it. The dream of a prosperous people rid of their primitive conditions, the existence of an egalitarian society in which its wealth will belong to those who produce it, a higher quality of life for all who work and a country that will not tolerate external dictation is as yet no more than a mere dream. The orderly progress that the founders of freedom had envisaged seems to have deteriorated into a situation wherein confusion

rather than clarity of vision is more apparent. We appear to be groping for the instruments necessary to bring about social equality and thereby make our workers and peasants a vital force. The left intelligentsia is either sulking in silence unable to impart the message of rejuvenation to those who continue to live in penury, or satisfies itself with delivering sermons to parties and individuals working among the masses. The ruling elite in these three decades has failed to respond to the invigorating currents of revolutionary thought and practice in sharp contrast to what is taking place in Asia and Africa.

Most of them appear to be content with allowing India to drift haplessly instead of calling upon the people to act as their predecessors did. These may be subjective reactions of a defeatist nature and indications that, by and large, the source of intellectual and revolutionary energy of political parties have withered away. Perhaps, below the surface, fresh currents of thought and action are germinating. History teaches one that stagnation is a temporary phenomenon, that the human mind knows no rest in its quest for truth and renews itself with ever expanding knowledge.

We in Asia and Africa have to redeem many a pledge before our people can attain their right to live as liberated human beings. The future alone will reveal whether the revolutionary elements in India will come together and organise the inarticulate millions so that their lives may be happier. Their aspirations to live as fully developed human personalities must be realised if our freedom is to be worthwhile.

On the 15th of August 1947 Jawaharlal Nehru had said, "The future beckons to us. Whither do we go and what shall be our endeavour? To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India; to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease; to build up a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions which will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman. We have hard work ahead. There is no resting for any one of us till we redeem our pledge in full, till we make all the people of India what destiny intended them to be".

For the generation that is in its full vigour today, this message is as true as it was thirty years back.

---

*Link*, August 15, 1977.



## 27. Republic Day Thoughts

WHILE the Congress and the Muslim League representatives were debating, discussing and analysing in the Central Legislative Assembly as to what exactly should be the new Constitution of Free India during 1946-47, I was travelling all over the country for days and weeks together. I was then in search of a new path to social liberation, a path that would end the exploitation of human beings.

This goal was the new challenge I thought we were up against specially for men and women who were involved in anti-imperialist struggles from the early thirties to the day when colonialism was forced to retreat—but for this we had to pay the price of a vivisectioned India. A more agonising period was when both Indian and British negotiators met to draw up the final terms of the settlement and it was realised that all efforts to stop the division of India could not be resisted and the inevitable happened.

Distracted and frustrated I decided to travel from the North to the South and study for myself the conditions in which our people lived. I was unfamiliar with the South, having lived exclusively in the North and was eager to learn and understand the way of life and thought of the southern regions of our country. It was for me a journey which revealed the superb natural beauty and cultural richness, an altogether unforgettable experience. Age has dimmed those memories but re-reading an account of my travels penned during the trips, I vividly remembered some of those personal reminiscences. Now after three decades I thought of sharing them with the readers of LINK which has entered the 25th year of its publication.

Many readers are sure to look upon these outpourings as that of

an emotionally stirred person, devoid of logic, and a political framework. I could not agree more with them because I myself think that I was very confused, almost dazed by the unexpected nature of political developments after the heady years of the 'Quit India' struggle. But whatever their worth, let me look back along with the readers now as a mere observer.

If only time would stop, if only there were a breakdown in the time machine! It might then be possible to arrest the swift moving crowded scenes of my non-stop 21-day journey. The roar of the sea and roar of human voices, how similar! Particularly when the latter became muffled and smothered...

Old towns walled and turreted by temple *gopurams*, tanks filled with sacred waters, fields and homesteads full of men, women and children and cattle, skies dotted with birds in the day and stars in the night—scenes the eye beheld in between the halts. Each halt had its own individuality while it lasted, its own programme, its local colour—but now with the passage of time one place might be another, every mass gathering like the one that preceded or followed it, one workers' assembly as much like the one that went before or after it! Imaginative integrity and artistic fancy demand a separate recording, a journey that was not meant to be empty of purpose.

To stop drifting talk (as if talk is all that matters) let me submit a diarised account of a period of time that has been spent in the fellowship of workers and vast numbers of men and women. Many an innocent questioner asked if this was an election tour! "No. A selection tour to select the elect if you will". To assess the capacity of workers; the nature of work and the psychological temper of the people can best sum up the objects with which we venture outside our immediate orbit.

The journey began in the afternoon on August 18 from Delhi. In the Nizam's territory at Dornakal, Khammameth and Madira, men and women asked for a message. The new reforms and the recent atrocity campaigns in certain villages have inflamed the state subjects. Bezawada and Tenali and onwards, one platform meeting after another followed. Everywhere the workers were reporting their 1942 actions and asking for a scheme of work for the future...

Andhradesa is the home of fiery people. The Communists are strongly organised there and busy sowing seeds of doubt in Con-



gress bona fides. Nevertheless, the people as elsewhere are not enamoured by their politics. But they have made deep inroads into the labour and kisan field....

A day in Madras town. The Madras Indian is not the phlegmatic he is made out to be. His full-blooded response to 1942 proved otherwise.... The rush begins: Villupuram, procession, meeting and then off to Chidambaram, with wayside meetings all the way....

The students of Annamalai University at Chidambaram innated in spite of official frowns on a meeting. Vociferous shouts of 'Long Live Revolution', brave ideas of willingness to do and die again. Railway workers agitated at strike prospects.... French-owned Karaikal, intensely anti-Imperialist. One of the most elaborately arranged meetings. When the hour of reckoning comes will we ever be able to make good the loss the people suffered in fighting the White oppressors?

On the run again to Tanjore. Once an emperor reigned here, But people do not remember that now. At Kumbakonam, the seat of South Indian intellectual orthodoxy, fifteen thousand people were jammed into a little park. Here in '42 shooting took place. Nine died including a little boy of ten. Did he know why he died? Will his unlined life increase the value of those who live after him?

In Tanjore the peasantry is in a state of ferment. Anti-Congress agents are busy. Zamindars of Tanjore feel they cannot fight both the Congress and the Communists. They are lining up with the former. In the silent manuscript world of the Tanjore library, the past lay docketed and neatly bundled. Tanjore District was one vast sea of turbulent ovation to '42, each garland a piece of exquisite floral artistry, sandalwood, incense and fruit offering. The Hindu mind turns to temple ritual as naturally as the sunflower turns to the rising sun.

Between Tanjore and Erode was another rush... Over the great anicut to Trichinopoly where the students and striking railway workers had to be addressed. The workers seemed confused and tense. The strike was a Communist challenge and nothing more. A public meeting. Twenty-five thousand people sat quietly and listened.

Through Mettur and Dharmapuri to Salem. In Salem, Rajaji's

area, activity amongst Congressmen is still of the routine hackneyed character. The Netaji Youth League movement is stronger here than the Congress or the RSD movement.

Off through Tiruppur to Coimbatore. Tiruppur is the Khadi capital of Tamilnad. Textile Mazdoors presented a guard of honour. Fifteen thousand came to the meeting. Between Tiruppur and Coimbatore there were meetings at Palladam and Suler. In '42 the people of Suler set fire to an aeroplane in a nearby aerodrome. Many were sentenced to life imprisonment, but were released when the Congress became the Government. At Thonda Muthur there was peasants' conference. They came with their womenfolk. Later, the biggest meeting of the whole tour assembled here. A lakh of people. They sat as if they were a military formation, so silently and with such dignity.

Tiruppur and Coimbatore were landmarks. Mass and organisational strength intense. Women and men workers and peasants, old and young aflame with the 'eternal fire that never dies'. Union work almost flawless. Coimbatore, a night sky studied with stars—strong breeze from the west. Working men and women in the entire district devoted to the Congress.

From Coimbatore through Mettupalayam, Pollachi to Udumalpet. A meeting in the bed of a huge tank that is dry. Rapt crowds listening to word images in Hindi translated into Tamil, a language fit for oratory. The Tamilians' response to eloquence very sensitive. Young men eager and anxious to begin work. When will controversies cease to hold the attention of workers and organised work grip our minds? How will we face the enormous tasks of guiding men whose faith and trust in the '42 resisters is almost blind.

Palni is a place of pilgrimage. Elephants headed the procession with the National Flag held high in their trunks. Through Dindigul, where 5,000 people had patiently waited for two hours, to Madura. In Madura 45,000 people sat and listened. There was tension. The railway strike was on.

From Madura of the Meenakshi Temple through Sivaganga, Devacottah and Karaikudi (where 20,000 people came to the meeting) to Pudukottah. This State of the South is ripe for struggle. Its State Congress is looked upon as a moderate body. Its young men and labour workers are intensely active. The Labour



Volunteer Corps is almost in military trim. Madura District is a potential Satara area. Puducottah very acutely anti-British and anti-personal value. Devacottah, scene of much repression. Almost on the Ballia scale. From Puducottah south-wards to the Cape.

In the silent hours of the night long past the time of retirement for rest, men and women await one's arrival. The look of mute appeal or glowing resolve in the eyes that gaze out of the assembled heads. Then time and space play tricks that almost challenge one's sanity. As the sun rose out of the sea washing the shores of Kanya Kumari, there was a new feeling in the air, a new tone in the voices around and the clouds poured their rainbow content into the waters of three oceans. The Maiden Goddess guarding this southernmost outpost, so legend has it, awaits the arrival of her groom. The religious mind might liken her vigil to India's impatient waiting.

From the Cape to Trivandrum capital of Travancore. The University Union had to be inaugurated. Five thousand, of whom 500 were women, were present. A visit to the Labour Union office with a girl volunteer's guard of honour. A huge meeting....

Through Quilon and Kottayam to Ernakulam, capital of Cochin with about half a dozen crowded meetings in between. Ernakulam, a town seething with Congress enthusiasm. Less strained in atmosphere than Travancore. Through Alwaye and Trichur, where the S.I. Rly workers again had to be addressed, to Palghat. More meetings on the way. Palghat meetings, one of the most responsive. Speeches in English have such an outlandish effect that it is almost nauseating to continue in it. A night's halt and again on the march. Feroke had a huge meeting. Feroke is famous for its Feroke Bridge Sabotage of 1942. Calicut...

Then through Elathur (the landing place of Vasco-da-Gama) and Quilandi, Badagara, to Mahe, the French 'possession' where a thousand had collected, to Tellicherry and Cannanore which is reputed to be the Communist stronghold. Then the return journey to Madras.

Travelling in buses and cars over hills and across valleys. Nearly two thousand miles of travelling, what have they brought in their wake? A stock of fresh experiences, images in serried ranks all closing in one upon another, a close-range view of men and

women talking Tamil and Malayalam, an impression of intensified hatred of the British and capitalist systems of overlordship. It echoed throughout the journey. Mountain ranges and rivers and provincial disputes are prevalent. But there are really just two nations—of the Have Nots and the Have Gots.

And in the twilight hour I hear again the sound of conches, the warwail of bagpipe music heard in Ramnad. I can see at night the huddled bed-dragged silhouettes of human beings on the verge of hunger, death..., eyes afire with the will to continue the fight for freedom..., words, reflecting shadowy sentiments.

Whether organisational activity will increase in the South after this visit or not I cannot say, I can only repeat that the people are prepared for it. If not we, others will handle them. It may not be a healthy lead. But a vacuum cannot remain unfilled....

And now on the eve of the thirty-fourth Republic Day, we will have to assess the achievements and the failures of the Republic in terms of the aspirations of the people and the conditions prevailing in the country.

---

*Link*, January 26, 1983.



come to the end of a long journey.

You may well ask why I should begin my talk today with this quotation from Nehru. I do so because the thought he expressed while advising young men and women, nearly three decades ago, seems so relevant today also. We are meeting at a moment of time when those of us who belong to the older generation of the great sisterhood of womankind must tell the younger generation as to what they should do to become effective participants, in making decisions which will shape every aspect of our national and international life, particularly concerning economic, social and political developments. We women bear a responsibility that is rooted in history because we represent that half of the human race which has, through the ages and in all parts of the world, endured so much suffering and oppression and, even so, has contributed so much to the human heritage of nobility and courage.

The National Federation of Indian Women in the course of its existence of over thirty years has struck roots in every part of our country and is proud of the fact that women from diverse sections have gathered together on its platform. The delegates here from almost every region testify to the fact that women are becoming aware and concerned about their disabilities as women, and are anxious to find ways and means of overcoming them. These obstacles, as we know, are inherited from a decadent period in India's history. But we are now beginning to realise that our strength will depend on how rapidly we can organise ourselves for multi-pronged action to fight for our rights. This assumes of course also the right and responsibility to discharge our duties as citizens.

Both in historical times gone by and in post-independence India, women have responded to challenges our country has faced at the national and regional levels. When Indira Gandhi was elected as Prime Minister of this vast country of millions, many in India wondered whether she could hold the reigns of power in her delicate hands. The story of the fifteen years of her leadership of the nation as Prime Minister is now well known. She rose to the occasion and fulfilled the expectations of millions by her firm adherence to Jawaharlal Nehru's legacy of building an economically self-reliant India wedded to non-alignment, friendship with socialist powers, and unbending resistance to those who are inimically disposed towards our country. And it was because of her ca-

## 28. National Federation of Indian Women

It is my privilege to welcome all of you to the 12th Congress of the National Federation of Indian Women. We are meeting on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the freedom won by India after almost two centuries of British domination, when we emerged as a sovereign nation carrying forward the legacy of a long revolutionary history. Delhi, where we are meeting, has witnessed the rise and fall of many empires as also the people's ability to overthrow tyrannical rule repeatedly; and finally it has seen the establishment of a Republic of free and equal men and women who cherish their hard-won right to be free and are determined to resist the conspiracies of imperialist forces, bent on destabilising and dividing the country.

Dear sisters, permit me to recall here what Jawaharlal Nehru, the valiant crusader for India's freedom, said when speaking at the convocation of Delhi University in 1958 when I happened to be present: "It is not the narrow lanes and houses of Old Delhi or the wide spaces and rather pretentious buildings of New Delhi that count, but the spirit of this ancient city. For Delhi has been an epitome of India's history with its succession of glory and disaster, and with its great capacity to absorb many cultures and yet remain itself. Even the stones here whisper to our ears of the ages of long ago, and the air we breathe is full of the dust and fragrance of the past as also of the fresh and piercing winds of the present. The procession of innumerable generations passes before our eyes. My own generation will join that procession, and it will then be for you, young men and women, to be the standard-bearers of all the good that we have lived for and we seek". These words depict and reflect the true spirit of India and my own frame of mind as I



capacity to stand firm as a rock against pressures to make India subservient to foreign interests, and her determination not to yield to religious fanaticism, abetted by hostile powers that she fell to the assassin's hail of bullets. It is equally significant that women along with men weathered the crisis which followed her assassination in October 1984 — that is, eight months after we met at the Guntur session. In this context I would like to mention the role in particular of the Punjab Stree Sabha and its courageous secretary, Vimala Dang. Their determined and sustained efforts to combat the fanaticism that has overtaken the Punjab prevented large scale communal riots which could have plunged this prosperous border region in fratricidal conflicts. We are not only proud of the brave members of the Punjab Stree Sabha but wish to assure them that we shall always remain vigilant and resist the efforts to destabilise and dismember the country's democratic social-political structure. And here let us remember that the conflicts between groups—whether based on caste or religion, region or language—are essentially the outcome of competition between the privileged upper layers within each group. But some sections of opportunists and propertied elites are able to embroil the propertyless and exploited masses by invoking bigotry in the name of religion, caste or language. These superficial slogans hide, and deflect attention from, the basic interests common to the unprivileged and exploited who are divided within each group from the privileged upper layers. Therefore we must guard against the perils of the misleading invocations of fanatics. They try to derail every progressive movement so that through their sectarian political parties and groups they can attain enough political power to undo the progress which India's essentially forward-looking government is trying to achieve.

In such a situation, enlightened men and women should persuade the members of the communities to which they belong to beware of what is called 'fundamentalism'. This reactionary wave affects even persons who generally have a healthy social outlook, as in the instance of the Supreme Court's judgement in the Shah Bano case. Regrettably, self-seeking politicians and obscurantist religious leaders succeeded in browbeating the Government of India to bring forward, hastily and unwisely, a law to nullify the effect of the Supreme Court judgement. Of course there is now talk of an optional common code that will be based on justice and

equality of the sexes but that need not be binding on all citizens. This is hardly adequate. The government of our secular republic cannot evade the problems which women face, whatever may be the religious or customary laws inherited from feudal times and encouraged by India's erstwhile alien masters.

The National Federation of Indian Women has all along (with other progressive women's organisations) campaigned against any compromises on the enactment of a common civil code for all Indians. We believe that the principles of justice and equality which have emerged in civilized nations should override every remnant of outmoded pseudo-religious edicts. I am sure you will agree that, with the spread of a scientific outlook, men and women will discard any restrictions which impede their basic desire to live purposefully and harmoniously. Unless society can attain a basic and stabilising harmony we will not be able to forge ahead towards the achievement of a democratic and egalitarian order in which women enjoy equal rights with men in fact and not merely in law.

The disparity between the sexes in India is nowhere more pronounced than in the area of literacy and education. It is a matter of shame for all of us—successive governments, we in the women's movement, and the political parties wedded to progress—that the literacy rates in India, overall and especially among women, are some of the lowest in the world. Even the privileged minority of the educated are not trained in schools and colleges to become socially aware and concerned citizens. Too many of the products of our public schools patterned on Anglo-American models pursue affluent consumerism as their objective, insensitive to the poverty and inequality in their motherland. In many cases, specialists trained at great public expense seek even higher levels of affluence in foreign lands.

Fortunately, social awareness is not dependent on formal education. The awareness of non-literate masses has brought about major transformations in various parts of the world in almost every century. I recall how, during the freedom movement, patriotic consciousness was roused among the unlettered masses by Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru, who were the greatest practitioners of the non-formal education which it is now fashionable to talk about. By their example they inspired thousands of constructive workers and freedom fighters. Similarly now, the activists of



desirable consequence of generating resistance to all innovation. A wider aspect of the question is the direction and purpose of applying modern science and technology. For whose benefit will they be utilised? To provide more luxury goods and services for those who are already well off, or more employment and income and a better quality of life for the poor and the deprived in villages and towns?

Besides our national priorities we have also to perform certain imperative duties on the global plane. We have seen that nuclear science and space technology have placed in the hands of the governments of industrially advanced countries the means of increasing human well-being, as well as nuclear weapons which can bring to an end all life on this earth. Some of the governments, like those of the U.S.A. and its allies, who are in possession of these weapons are pursuing a shortsighted and suicidal policy of trying to threaten other countries into submission to their designs of world domination. This is the greatest menace which humanity faces today. Our foremost international task therefore is to press for the outlawing of nuclear weapons. World peace must be established securely on the foundations of human rights irrespective of skin colour, sex or creed. It is my honest belief that at the present moment only by adopting the principles of non-alignment and of peaceful co-existence between countries whatever their political systems can we guarantee humankind's right to live.

Friends! As we look back on our Federation's work during the last 32 years we can take legitimate pride in the contribution that we have been able to make to raising the consciousness, status and working conditions of Indian women; their participation in the world-wide fight against apartheid, racialism and all forms of imperialist intervention in other countries' affairs; and the mobilisation of opinion against the piling up of nuclear arms and their deployment in outer space. Our Federation is the largest Asian component of the Women's International Democratic Federation. As such we have always tried to play our part in the worldwide effort of womankind, highlighted by the observance of the Women's Decade by the United Nations and by numerous international conferences, to promote Equality, Development and Peace. We have been consciously on guard against the twin dangers of what I would call five-star feminism and of a retaliatory fe-

our Federation should undertake, on a much larger scale than at present, the tasks of consciousness-raising, craft training, literacy and continuing education. And there are so many other dimensions of the good work they can do. They can help to bridge the large gap between laws on the statute book and the realities on the ground, whether it is in respect of legislation on women's rights, dowry, minimum wages, maternity leave or equal pay. Many women in the country are not even aware of their legal rights, and of the opportunities of employment and loans for productive purposes available under the poverty alleviation programmes. We must acknowledge our share of the blame for this unawareness. Our cadres should make more and more women aware of, and help them to benefit from, their rights and opportunities. By generating sustained popular pressure, the Federation's workers can make the administration accountable for the proper enforcement of social health laws such as those pertaining to dowry and the flesh trade. The administration, the banks and co-operatives should be made accountable similarly for the honest implementation of anti-poverty programmes so that the benefit actually reaches the intended beneficiaries.

What I wish to convey is that social work of a comprehensive nature undertaken zealously can help to bring about a social transformation. This will require, in addition to part-time participation by growing numbers of the Federation's members, a core of full-time cadres running into several hundreds. There are many among the young women leaving school and college, each year, who would like to apply their energies and talents to the improvement of society and, in particular, to help their less fortunate sisters. The Federation should attract and train such people, and offer them remuneration at a level that will meet their basic needs.

A question that has in recent years caused us concern is the impact of new technology. While we must welcome the application of modern technology for reducing drudgery and improving the conditions of living and of work in the home, the factory or field, we have seen that the reckless induction of high technology, in the textile industry for instance, has had adverse consequences. It is displacing women who are generally uneducated and less equipped than men to be retrained for the new technology. Technological change should be wisely regulated so as to avoid the un-



male chauvinism. We have tried to keep close to the problems of the rural and urban poor. And we have been working hand in hand with mass organisations, comprising both men and women, which strive for the removal of poverty and exploitation.

I have referred to some of the problems we are facing and there are many others that will be placed before you in the Report by the Federation's dynamic and able general secretary, Vimala Farooqui. I hope that by exchanging the experiences and views of the Indian delegates and the friends from other countries, we will be able, during this congress, to arrive at a broadly shared understanding of the present situation and realistic answers to our problems.

Dear comrades! I have shared my thoughts with you today at some length so that they may stimulate thinking on the challenges that face human civilisation at this point in history. I am firmly of the view that the women's movement in our country has to undertake the enormous task of social regeneration to enable us to participate as intelligently and effectively as possible in every decision-making forum. The field of work is so vast that it calls for united effort by all organisations working among women for similar objectives.

As I come to the end of life's long journey it is my ardent hope that those of you who will be crossing over to the next century will do your human best to enrich the lives of men, women and children who are as of now deprived of the means to live a full life. Very recently the comparatively young statesman at the helm of affairs in the Soviet Union—General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev—who visited our country a few weeks ago said: "Let us go forward from where the earlier generation have left off. They completed their part of the journey. Now it is for us to go forward". I hope you share this desire to march ahead together with all those who also believe in a more just social order.

I am grateful to my colleagues and comrades in the National Federation of Indian Women for acceding at last to my repeated request to permit me to pass on my responsibility as President to one who is younger and full of vigour and wholly identified with the Federation's social and political outlook. You can, of course, always call on me for such advice and assistance as I can render during the remaining period of my life

I have received so much from you in terms of affection, tolerance and goodwill that I can never repay the debt in full measure. May you all live long to serve your country and your people, and may you regard your good work as its own just reward.

---

Presidential address at the 12th Congress of the National Federation of Indian Women, Delhi, December 1986.



## 29. Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration

ESTEEMED Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Respected Chairman Narasimha Rao and members of the Award Advisory Committee, distinguished guests, friends and comrades:

As I stand before you on this sad and yet a significant anniversary, my mind goes back to that tragic morning when Indira Gandhi's frail body was riddled with bullets fired by the very men who were expected to guard her from any harm.

I remember pleading with her around the 15th October 1984 to abandon her tours for a while, as I had come to know during my visits to Punjab that the terrorists were determined to kill her before the end of the year. She brushed aside my suggestion saying, "Surely, I cannot give up meeting the people".

That response was characteristic of Indira Gandhi. She was tender and firm, soft and hard, and she was loved by the people and bitterly criticised by her opponents. Her charisma had spread far, and wherever she went the masses flocked to see and hear her. And yet very often she had to face brickbats and black flags of hostile groups determined to challenge her hold on the people. Despite the short-lived opposition wave, she was elected to the Lok Sabha from such varied constituencies as those of Rae Bareilly in the North, Chikmagalur in the South and Medak in the Deccan.

Whatever the dross of human frailty in Indira, it was burnt up in the funeral flames that consumed her murdered body. The common people, especially women, wept bitterly as they mourned the loss of a benefactor. What will happen to us now, they asked.

The world community was plunged in grief as the news of her death spread to far corners of the earth. In sixteen years as Prime

Minister, Indira Gandhi had earned an eminent position as a world statesman, as a firm opponent of imperialist arrogance, and one who inspired the non-aligned to resist every effort to pressurise them into submission.

Friends, I am very conscious of the recognition bestowed on me today but am equally embarrassed while accepting the honour. Persons of my generation believed that the work we were privileged to undertake was and should remain its own reward. And the thought that two of the greatest sons of our motherland in our age, Gandhiji and Jawaharlalji, encouraged my work make me feel elated enormously. That was more than I had ever expected.

And yet I have often wondered why in the course of barely four decades of our freedom have we betrayed Gandhiji. Not only did we permit a fanatical traitor to send him to his death at the very dawn of freedom, but thereafter we have done little to clean out the stagnant pools of a decadent past—religious bigotry, caste and clannish prejudices, and a society where the affluent classes flourish, while others who toil hard are denied even the basic needs of bare existence. I ask myself: are we, who joined the fight for freedom, not responsible partly for the prevailing lack of values in public life? Why did not the generation that helped to win freedom swing into united action to rebuild the shattered social framework of a partitioned country? Why have we failed? Is it because the hankering for political power leads to amassing of wealth in order to achieve power; instead why could we not rely on hard work among the people to win their confidence and their support at the polls? Did we undertake the task of conveying to our people what Jawaharlal Nehru meant when he said that the new dams that India built were her new temples? Did we redistribute our land on the principle that it should be owned by the tiller? Did we ensure that, as Jawaharlal Nehru stressed, science and technology should be harnessed so that the benefits of social production can reach those who live by their toil? Forgive me, if I have taxed you with so many questions.

Of course the enlightened intelligentsia of today has been examining these problems in seminars and symposia, but I wonder why their formulations and solutions do not ignite the minds of men and women down the social ladder.

More than others, political parties and groupings at the nation-



al and regional levels need to examine why our religious beliefs are misused for grabbing political power. Innocent men and women are being shot to death in their homes or on the streets to bring about a further division of India. And we seem to be helpless lookers-on of these ghastly killings.

I realise that it is not enough to understand what ails us. What we in India require is a new band of sincere men and women with positive convictions who can help change our society. I hope that our young Prime Minister, who has successfully weathered three years full of challenge, will do everything possible to galvanize the inherent idealism in our young men and women who alone, I believe can be the instruments of economic and social transformation, so essential for India's survival in the coming century and beyond. And I hope that the younger generation will redeem in fuller measure the pledge we took to serve India and her people when we were young.

Finally, may I share with you the thought that it will be appropriate to make the Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration available to an institution in which young men and women of all communities are engaged in building tomorrow's India, rather than to an individual. Accordingly, I have decided to donate the amount I am receiving today to the Mass Communication and Research Centre of Jamia Millia to institute an annual prize in memory of Dr. Zakir Husain. He was a patriot and a pioneering educationist who, responding to Gandhiji's call, helped to found Jamia Millia as a centre of national education. The annual prize may be given to a person below the age of 30 or 35, irrespective of his or her community, for outstanding contribution during the previous year to an analysis of the problems of national integration.

I hope this initial prize fund will prove to be a nucleus and will attract further donation to make it substantial.

Let me conclude by thanking the Prime Minister and all of you for sparing your time to participate in today's function.

---

Acceptance speech delivered on 31st October, 1987 on being awarded the Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration.

## 30. Making the Constitution Meaningful

WHEN I ask ordinary men and women, in villages around Delhi and in the Capital's slums, what the 26th of January means to them, the response is almost invariably that it is the day of the big parade.

It is sad that 38 years after the coming into force of free India's Constitution, the great majority of our people should lack education and be unaware of the significance of the Republic anniversary.

Ours is the unhappy distinction of having the largest number of poor and illiterates among the countries of the world. At the 1981 census, only 36.2 per cent of the population were literate, the literacy rate among men being 46.9 per cent and women's literacy much lower, at 24.5 per cent.

This is but one facet of the disparity in income and opportunity, which disfigures our society. Why this yawning gap between today's reality and the vision entertained by Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru of economic and social transformation in 40 years of a politically-free India? Those who drafted our Republic can Constitution in the wake of independence intended it to be a fine blend of the individual's right to freedom of belief and of political organisation associated with Western democracy and the concern for social justice and equality of opportunity in-built in the Soviet system which was equally admired by our thinkers and poets like Nehru, Tagore, Bharati and Vallathol.

Political equality and the citizen's right to freedom were enunciated as Fundamental Rights, enforceable by an appeal to the courts. But the citizen's economic and social rights to education



and employment were not made fundamental. They were merely set out as Directive Principles of State Policy without any legal sanction for enforcement.

The difference would not have mattered if, in our public life after the British withdrew, we had retained the idealism which marked the era of India's freedom struggle. On the contrary, the earlier idealism, it seems, has given way only to scramble, for power among all the political parties. They are not interested in serving the people but on securing their votes, more often than not at the cost of secular principles. Considerations of caste, religion and language guide their thinking when selecting candidates.

The Directive Principles, not being mandatory, have, in consequence, been largely ignored. But what is to be done? Can we not re-examine the Constitution as we enter the 39th year of the Republic? Political parties and the intelligentsia can, in my view, do well to debate in earnest certain basic changes that could make the Constitution more meaningful to the deprived majority of our people.

The proposed debate might, for instance, consider the transfer of the crucial provisions regarding social security and universal education from the Directive Principles to the chapter on Fundamental Rights.

It is true that a guarantee of the right to work, with the corollary of unemployment relief, and the provision of free and compulsory education will call for investment, organisation and management on a massive scale. The 40 per cent of families in the country who live below the poverty line, for instance, cannot help putting their children to work at a tender age. And it would be cruel to compel parents to send their children to school unless adequate compensation is paid for their children's labour. Besides, children from poor homes will need to be provided with nutritious food and school and home atmosphere congenial for study, to enable them to catch up with the learning ability of students from well-to-do families.

The necessary resources can, undoubtedly, be found if there is the political will to reorder our priorities. It can be done by cutting down the investment on production of non-essential goods and provision of luxury services to cater for the multistar consumerist needs of the elitist sectors in our society. Then only can we find

the physical financial resources needed for the neglected task of providing equality of opportunity to all our people.

I realise, of course, that the austerity which Gandhiji expected us to practise during the freedom struggle is no less necessary today if we choose to work for the masses and are honest in our dedication to them. The material and cultural gap separating the ruling elite from the common people needs to be bridged. We can and should try to go back to the earlier disciplines we had cultivated. But the problem is that the environment today—social, political, national and international—has changed from what it was during the struggles of yesterday. With the best of intentions, I myself find it difficult to adhere to what I am often tempted to 'preach'. But I belong to a tired class.

These stray of thoughts on the occasion of our Republic Day in 1988 are some musings I wanted to share with those who wrote this column.

---

Article in Republic Day 1988 Supplement of *National Herald*.



## B. INDIA IN THE WORLD

### 31. World Congress of Women

IN recent years the realisation all over the world that a thermonuclear war means total annihilation of vast sections of the human race has brought about a qualitative change in the women's movement. It has been forced to take note of the grim fact that unless the forces that are determined to unleash a war are checked, unless the organised will of women helps to halt those who callously talk of war as an inevitability, the world of men, women and children and everything that goes to make human life civilized will be reduced to nothing more than a heap of nuclear ash.

This realisation that if women want their children to live, they must act immediately seems to have electrified them. They know now as never before that they have a special responsibility to see that every effort is made to ensure world peace and universal disarmament. They realise that world statesmen left to themselves are apt to think only in terms of party or national prestige, rather than in terms of social, personal, and human values.

The awareness of impending doom permeated the proceedings of the World Congress of Women held in Moscow under the auspices of the Women's International Democratic Federation throughout the six days. For hours together delegates from Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and Australasia struggled to underline the importance of saving the world from a holocaust, for struggling against imperialist warmongers, for the immediate end to colonial regimes. Even when discussing matters that concern strictly domestic and social problems such as measures to improve the health, education and upbringing of children, or the rights of women in society and family, they began and ended their speeches with emphatic formulations on the urgent need to banish war, the

and arms race, nuclear tests and of course imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism.

To my mind this is a new development brought about by the widespread belief that atomic warfare cannot be confined to a few continents, sparing some and destroying others. The spread of knowledge of atomic weapons and the ghastly thought that Hiroshima was a trifling affair as compared to what is in store if mad men insist on declaring war on mankind, has made women feel intensely anxious. Their anxiety and anguish was very apparent as delegates constantly referred to the urgent need to work for peace and a negotiated settlement of all disputes, national and international. Those who placed a contrary view and wanted the Congress not to emphasise the peace tasks, not to give priority to work for disarmament and peaceful co-existence were completely overruled. They were in fact shunned for having exhibited a crude and limited understanding of world forces.

Thus while the commonly felt dangers of our nuclear age united the overwhelming majority of delegates, a very small group led by the Chinese representatives differed sharply from this understanding. They could not reconcile themselves to the position that peace depends on peaceful co-existence between capitalist, imperialist, socialist and newly liberated countries of the world. They would not agree that disarmament weakens the aggressive powers and therefore strengthens those who have no vested interest in war. They insisted in fact in every commission and in the plenary session that since the root cause of every conflict, national and international, is imperialism, the Congress should concentrate solely on discussion of measures for destroying it. The Chinese could not and would not accept the revolutionary bona fides of anyone who argued that since a nuclear war would destroy humanity itself its prevention should be the primary concern of enlightened men and women. Whether it was the report on educational reform, facilities for children's health or the removal of social disabilities of women, the Chinese delegation insisted on introducing its pet formula that "without opposing imperialism and without unflagging struggle against it, peace and national independence cannot be ensured, nor women's rights and children's happiness secured". This exasperated and irritated every delegation, except, of course, the Albanian, North Korean, Vietnamese and the Indonesian delegations.



It was therefore not really surprising that the Chinese protested so vigorously and if I may say, crudely when we appealed for a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the India-China border conflict. Their hysterical behaviour throughout the sessions, all maxed as it was by bitter denunciation of the concluding declaration of the Congress, saddened us all beyond measure. Those who had cherished illusions about the renowned wisdom of the Chinese outlook on life were bewildered, those who regard the present Chinese leadership as followers of Marx and Lenin wondered what made them so rigid and unrealistic. We who had suffered most because of their distorted and twisted understanding of our class forces, their aggressively arrogant behaviour, were somewhat comforted at the thought that at last their anti-Indian propaganda was exposed. Their virulent fabrications based on half-truths with chauvinism rather than Marxism as their guide to action cannot hereafter ever effectively hide the facts and realities of the India-China border dispute.

---

*Link, July 14, 1963.*

## 32. Moscow Revisited

---

THE waters of the Moskva river are as placid and calm. The sun when it shines and the skies whether clear or overcast are not different. The green in the trees is not more green and the air is cool and warm by turn as it used to be. But nearly everything else is transformed and makes Moscow look like an enlarged edition of what it was ten years ago.

Moscow's wide streets look wider, cleaner and busier. There are many more cars, taxis, buses and of course trucks speeding away not faster than sound yet but much faster than before. There is no possibility of traffic jams as the new rules with elaborate road markings and lights and facilities for pedestrians render collisions impossible unless of course everyone driving a vehicle loses control of the wheel simultaneously.

Public transport facilities have increased so rapidly and the system is so well organised that one hardly notices the bustle and din that are characteristic of rush hours. But, tram or trolley, fares are uniform for any distance within the city. Public vehicles have no conductors to collect the fares. Instead they have mechanically operated systems. Passengers drop their fares and collect tickets themselves. The metro or the underground railway system links up every part of the city and is electronically operated. City transport is already fantastically cheap and it is to be free soon.

The numerous parks of culture and recreation are full of holiday makers. No entrance fee is charged for the daily programmes of relaxation and education which attract vast crowds. For youth there are new pioneer palaces within the city and pioneer holiday camps in the outskirts.

The cleanliness of the broad highways and parks is enviable in-



deed. The Moscow Municipal Organisation, must have increased many times its expenditure on sanitation, lighting, on decorative flower beds, lawns and trees along its avenues and roads to make the entire city so pleasing. The drabness associated with post-war Moscow has vanished completely and what has contributed most to make this a possibility are the new palatial buildings which flank the main thoroughfares.

These residential blocks have several built-in facilities for the residents; they provide for a creche, laundry, first aid and other community services. The shops on the ground floor use modern methods of window display and hereby help to give Moscow a near West European look of modernity and prosperity. Gone very soon will be the days when New York, London and Paris addicts could sniff at Moscow's lack of sophisticated shops and restaurants.

Restaurants and coffee houses are becoming more and more popular. And these serve a variety of continental and Soviet Asian foods. In many cafes bread is free. These are patronised also by Moscow's growing international community including large numbers of students from Africa and Asia who are here for technical and other training. In these summer months there is a heavy rush of foreign tourists, specially Americans. Arrangements for tourists include provision of interpreters and transport and these leave nothing to be desired. Foreign languages are popular with the young Soviet students and facilities for their study are enormous. Many Soviet students already know Hindi and other Indian languages.

The new department stores seem to have everything that man, woman and child need to satisfy their need for comfort and wellbeing. And the endlessly crowded shops are surely an indication of the capacity of the people to buy what they need. My interpreter indignantly rejected the suggestion that they might just be window shopping. She retorted "We never enter a shop if we don't mean to buy something."

Judged by our Asian and particularly Indian standards the Moscow citizen was, I think, even in the fifties very comfortably dressed. But here again things are very different with the dresses and clothes men, women and children are wearing now. They are almost as well groomed as those of any West European metropolis, excluding may be their small circles of plutocrats for whom

money in enormous quantities is available because after all they are the fashion leaders of their nations. Comparisons apart, the people of Moscow today look healthier and better clothed than ever before. Whether you see them in restaurants, parks or theatres they look relaxed and satisfied; the old expression of harassment has disappeared. They probably have realised that their leaders have seen to it that the present era of peace will not be disturbed.

These external changes are matched by an equal if not greater change in the attitude of individuals. Soviet citizens have lost much that was mechanical in their personality. They are rapidly getting rid of the old inhibition and becoming flexible, communicative and tolerant. They have ceased to be boastful in claiming this or that achievement of their state or party. While very proud indeed of their Tereshkova and overjoyed at her heroic deed, I did not hear anyone gloat over the fact that they did it—and not the Americans. Ten years ago you could not escape being lectured at and told that only Soviet science, industry and art was capable of achieving this, that and the other target. A maturer outlook that takes success in all fields of life for granted has replaced the earlier attitude of feeling superior to one and all. They are now capable of assessing life objectively and are eager to know how other people solve their problems, to learn as well as to teach.

This freedom of outlook as we all know has a backdrop of intense political and economic activity. Marxism and its fundamental formulations are being debated and discussed furiously. Ever since the Chinese allies of the Soviet Union made anti-Soviet propaganda their main instrument of foreign policy, the leaders of the Communist Party have to argue and disprove their slanders and distortions. This hostile development from a friendly source has come as a shock but it has not demoralised the people. They are confident that the logic of Marxist theory will prevail and finally compel their opponents from the West and East to acknowledge their mistake. Patience and understanding they feel will pay and not intolerance and stubborn resistance to facts. Could anyone talking to Soviet theoreticians and leaders in the fifties have imagined that they would in the course of a decade evolve so rapidly?

Many of us are apt to assume that the changes in Soviet society



have come about easily because of the rapidity of the rate of economic development. It is a facile and dangerous assumption. We would be wiser if we realise that they have had to wage a war against poverty by mobilising the skill of their hands, the sweat of their brows and the inventiveness of their minds. Without a determined effort to eradicate this evil they could not have become the second largest industrial power of the world and also establish the first socialist state. The new aim of reaching communist goals have become the battle cry of the present generation. In trying to attain these, the contradictions between the rights of the individual and the demands of the state are being and will have to be resolved rationally. Whether the struggle will be as strenuous as the earlier struggles will depend to a very large degree on the plans of their opponents of the Atlantic and the Pacific regions.

While there is no attempt at minimising their threats, the people I have met and talked to are quite confident of overcoming the present difficulties and establishing a triumphant social order of equality and freedom. Obviously faith is not born of intuitive knowledge alone. Rational beliefs can also inspire men and women to live unselfish lives to aspire to be good neighbours to all—in short to be humane.

Does this mean that in the last decade all the dross in the human makeup has been cleansed? Undoubtedly not—the process that transforms us from lesser to higher beings are slow, and constant and infinite vigilance alone can speed up the pace. Soviet society appears to be aware of this need and its leaders are anxious to eliminate its weaknesses. They are conscious of its shortcomings and are eager to overcome them. Probably that is why men and women from several lands come here not only to see but more to learn.

---

*Link*, July 21, 1963.

### 33. London—A Profile

---

LONDON is not just another European capital to Indians of my generation and class. It has been for nearly 200 years the centre of much that we have grown up to dislike, and some things that we like. We have even today an ambivalent attitude to it. Several of our elder statesmen do not of course quite agree with those of us who insist on carrying forward our old prejudices about the once mighty British Empire. London does not of course retain any longer its crucial pre-freedom significance to the nationalist Indian. But the reminiscences of the days when the ruling classes of Britain, Tory and Labour, refused to yield power come pouring in as one drives along London's historic sites and monuments. The House of Commons and Lords do not incite any more the anger or despair they used to in the past. The feeling of inferiority made up of a host of complexes has vanished yielding place to a sense of wonderment at the continued and obvious prosperity of "never had it so good" Britain.

The ravages of World War II have been wiped out. The loss of vast portions of Britain's Afro-Asian empire doesn't seem to have affected the average living standard of her people. Maybe it is not as affluent a society as that of the USA, but it undeniably looks very much better provided than it was in the 1947-50 period. Economists and statisticians notwithstanding, the loss of empire seems to agree with them, and paradoxically enough, the disappearance of political bondage has not as yet given us that freedom from want and care that should have been ours. The upside down state of affairs must have several explanations in terms of socio-economic theories, but for those of us who witnessed (and were participants) in the closing phase of the Indo-British conflict



there are no immediately satisfying arguments. The capitalist imperialist order did not collapse with the advance of national liberation movements; the new and freed countries are far from their goals of industrial growth and social progress. Colonialism is obviously dying out but the damage has not been made good, while in the meantime the solidarity of the socialist sector of the world has been rudely and disastrously shaken.

Are these thoughts irrelevant to the situation as it exists here? Not quite as much as it might have been had the closing weeks of June and July been less full of political drama. The great Sino-Soviet debate in Moscow and the negotiations that began on July 15 are topics of great interest among all sections of the politically wide awake people of London. Both Tories and members of the Labour Party are greatly concerned for different reasons about the outcome of the Moscow consultations. The shape of things in every corner of the globe, they feel, will be greatly altered if the Soviet and Chinese disagreements lead to a parting of the ways. Should the East and the West agree even to meet half-way in the wake of the beginning of a totally new phase in international communism, many long-standing international relationships will have to undergo drastic changes.

British public opinion generally is most anxious to appear to be neutral in this controversy but I have personally come to the conclusion that it has a tendency to be more sympathetic to the Chinese argument. Again this is for reasons very different from those of pro-Chinese Communists outside China.

The need for Chinese markets on the one hand and intense irritation with almost everything American makes Englishmen and women take a sympathetic view of China's difficulties. As for where their sympathies lie on our border conflict with the Chinese, it should be clear from the fact that most Britishers are not even prepared to give us a fair hearing. Is this entirely because we were late in explaining our case? I think that is not the entire reason. Englishmen generally are not prepared to agree that the Chinese are more sinning than sinned against. They are not ready to be convinced that our moral and material righteousness is beyond question. This cold English attitude to India has to be interpreted in terms of their general understanding of events to which I have referred earlier.

British life as it is lived in London is so full that by comparison we who live in India's Capital are on a primitive level. Their interests range from every form of art, literature, and the theatre to all the more serious subjects associated with genuine intellectual curiosity. One has only to look through English newspapers and journals to get a glimpse of the nature of their almost encyclopaedic interests. From literature, plays and lectures to social and political topics there is nothing they do not take seriously. This zest for living fully and purposefully also includes a very sophisticated interest in sport even among people for whom, according to us, the lighter pleasures of life should be ruled out.

And yet, no account of contemporary London would be complete without a reference to the average Londoner's capacity for constant and concentrated work. They not only do work for a living (as everywhere) but if they are to live comfortably they have to work at home also. Our own upper and middle classes have come to believe that to be efficient in a profession or an office or business, we must have a great deal of assistance in managing our daily lives, requiring the labour of other people at every level. How hollow such a belief is becomes clear when one sees some of the most distinguished members of London's middle and intellectual classes engaged in doing everything for themselves in addition to their normal professional duties.

The framework of a society of course determines its essence. Moscow and London are centres of two entirely different systems of social living. Even so, one cannot but help note the many similarities in approach.

---

*Link*, July 28, 1963.



## 34. Japan: New Horizons

JAPAN, the island kingdom of Asia, floats in the vast blue waters of the Pacific Ocean like a brilliantly lit ship. Asians visiting it for the first time are taken aback and overwhelmed by its utter and blaring modernity. It makes them wonder for a while whether modern Japan can really be regarded as a part of the Asian continent. Accustomed as we are to associate the virtues and vices of highly industrialised societies with Europe and America, the urban scene in Japan has a peculiarly incongruous, almost an un-Asian look. Knowledge of Japan's un-Asian history—its leap towards the industrial revolution a century before all other Asian countries, of its wars and empires, its victories and defeats notwithstanding, the visual impact of present-day Japan on fellow Asians (particularly from countries suppressed for centuries) is irresistibly forceful. It stuns them with the sudden realization that tremendous efforts have to be made by an Asian people if they want to live fully in the 20th Century and not partially in the fifteenth and even earlier centuries.

Japan's advance should specially thrill the free and forward-looking peoples of Asia and Africa. This feeling of elation however is superficial, in the sense that it does no more than help to lessen the weight of depression and despair over Asian inferiority as against European superiority. Obviously the historic process that led to Japan's rejection of what existed in its premodern age was essentially capitalist and imperialist and eventually fascist. Its industrial revolution therefore was accompanied by all the restricting and reactionary features of Western Imperialism and a political system that engineered a series of disasters for the people as a whole.

No patriotic and progressive Asian, therefore, can urge that the manner chosen by Japan to enter the industrial age is justifiable and much less be an advocate for a similar way of development for the rest of Asia and Africa. But the fact that despite the absence of any kind of a bourgeois democratic order in pre-war Japan, the working class and its trade union and political organisations could assert themselves and challenge both their own conservative forces and American interventions and machinations so successfully, provides powerful testimony to the innate capacity of the Japanese to imbibe the essentials of the new age of science and industry and political theory relevant to a revolutionary period.

Clearly a remarkable transformation in social attitudes and values has taken place at every level of intellectual leadership in Japan, political, cultural and social because of the Second World War. The new leadership is fully aware of the consequence of material prosperity in a society full of capitalist contradictions. Awareness of the ugly, demoralising and degenerate aspects of the competitive order which influenced Japan in the past and continues in the present is common not only among Japanese communists and socialists but also among liberals like Prof. Okochi Kazuo who told Tokyo University students, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.... The important thing for university graduates is not to set themselves on the road to success, or the route to the executive desk, but to know how to remedy the faults of Japanese society". The faults he had in mind were specifically those of a capitalist society.

This dissatisfaction is not confined merely to the intellectuals. Opposition to the Government and the ruling class for its conservative economics and anti-national social policies is growing, specially when it submits shamelessly to American overlordism. And it is subjected to constant attacks not only by the Socialist and Communist parties and powerful trade unions under the leadership of the Sohyo, but by religious and cultural organisations also. Surprisingly enough, an influential section of the Japanese press (despite its links with big business) is critical of the present Government, again more specifically when it surrenders to American pressure.

While the social climate, generally speaking, is not one of total subservience to the West, the vested interest (as in all lands) en-



courages everything that may protect its privileges whatever the humiliation. However, the bitter memories of imperialist aggression by its own war-mongers and relation by those who have now invaded Japan's fair soil and contaminated the seas around it, are as yet fresh in the minds of millions. The resistance to foreign methods is growing steadily. The vast annual A and H Bomb Conferences, the militant students' movement, and the working class and left wing organizations are unyielding in their determination to usher in a socialist society and free mankind for all time from the menace of nuclear wars. Facing them the conservative elements of Japan are not as powerful as is generally assumed because they cannot pursue their ends without rousing mass anger and are very often forced to retreat.

Naturally, reactionary circles are taking full advantage of the Sino-Soviet estrangement and gloating over the fact that it has weakened progressive elements greatly. They are willing to accept the arguments of the present rulers of Communist China in favour of trade relations and are making numerous non-political but friendly gestures by propagating not only theories of racial and cultural kinship with the Chinese people but of even admitting that they owe the Chinese compensation for the wrongs they have suffered at the hands of Japanese war-mongers! If Communist China does not object to making deals with a country that has been forced to give full diplomatic recognition to Chiang Kai Shek's regime in Formosa, why should the present Government of Japan and its American advisers mind it! On the contrary, there is every evidence to suggest that the Japanese ruling party's assiduous efforts for a rapprochement with Communist China are viewed with sympathy by the more shrewd among American policy-makers.

**Old and New:** It is impossible to gather all the impressions one wants to of a fascinating and stimulating country like Japan and specially its people, in the course of twelve brief days. There are ever so many interesting features that require careful study specially the cultural impact of the West, and its ramifications.

Even a hurried look at Japan's colossal and well organised capital, Tokyo, is indeed revealing. The blending of the old with the new is going on in every field of life and the inevitable

adjustments are not free of awkward angularities. Culturally Japan has no problems of diversity as in our country, it is therefore easier to replace the old with the new on a national scale.

The Japanese are a very aesthetic people. They are sensitive to beauty and, love to make every thing about them beautiful. Be it the home, temple, the old world eating house or the modern restaurant, there is always the effort at introducing something that pleases the eyes. There is also an air of considerateness about their manners quite different in its quality to the formally polite ways of the Western world. Although they have virtually discarded their national costume in favour of modern European clothes they have proudly held on to their language and made it the vehicle of all learning including the most abstruse scientific subjects.

Our hosts in Japan were convinced socialists and they were full of optimism and hope that a socialist Japan is, if not imminent, a certainty in the foreseeable future.

Superficial observations can never reveal the inner realities of a society in the throes of change. But the fact that Japanese society is changing rapidly and is in a hurry to catch up with the West, specially the U.S.A., is so obvious that one cannot help reaching the conclusion that economic contradictions notwithstanding, the working people of this amazingly vital island will reach a standard of life that will compare very well with the world's most successful capitalism soon. A study of the charter of demands of the various trade unions would endorse this.

Finally one cannot but conclude that, if peace is ensured even for another decade and the militant socialist and trade union movements are not denied their rights of organisation and franchise, Japan may well be the first Asian country in which a full-fledged socialist government will emerge through constitutional means.

*Link, September 6, 1964.*

---

The author visited Japan in August 1964 as the leader of a nine-member Indian delegation to two conferences against A and H Bombs held in Hiroshima and Tokyo. The Indian delegation along with delegations from 27 other countries withdrew from the Tokyo conference because its organizers, under Chinese dictation, kept them out of its leading committees. The Hiroshima conference backed by the Japanese Socialist Party and Sohyo evoked wide response from the Japanese people.



## 35. A Letter From Abroad...

EVENTS move so fast that communication becomes difficult even when absence from one's country and field of action is as short as sixty days. Intervening time and distance blur familiar categories and images tend to get distorted, the result being a surprising change in thought patterns.

Why then the urgency to communicate? In this special case it perhaps is due to the realization that I will not be at home on the eighteenth anniversary of our emancipation from foreign rule. That however cannot be a complete explanation; but explanations and justifications are of their nature subjective and my desire to communicate with readers of LINK, must have a relevance in terms of mutual interest.

Travel and the observation of patterns of human behaviour and purpose in different countries have never been to me an end unrelated to the comprehension of immediate problems confronting us. Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "If we go to foreign countries it is in search of the present. That search is necessary, for isolation from it means backwardness and decay.... We have to play our part in this coming internationalism and for this purpose, to travel, meet others, learn from them and understand them".

But is it possible to learn much in the brief spells we allow ourselves for attending international gatherings and meeting friends? Therefore, these observations inasmuch as they may refer to problems and conditions in other countries should be accepted as a fleeting attempt at sharing somewhat superficially my thoughts with such of LINK's readers as may care to do so.

Life in Europe, West as well as East and in the Soviet Union, is

shaped by physical, industrial and social environments very different from ours. But it would be wrong to assume that they are not distinct from one another also. Therefore a degree of objectivity and caution is necessary when making comparisons as between them and as for us and the industrialized world, the tendency for mechanical application of solutions to what look like similar problems would lead to quite irrelevant conclusions. Equally, it would be very wrong to compare conditions in countries where exploitation of society by right of ownership of private property prevails with others where the ownership of practically all means of production and distribution is under social control, and exploitation for individual profit has been abolished. There is a basic difference between the ethics of these two ways of life. Nevertheless a considerable degree of similarity is also obvious.

What one is continuously reminded of is that in spite of their radically opposed social systems, both capitalist and socialist societies are the creators and creatures of their industrial revolutions. Their scientific inventiveness, skills and systems of incentives relentlessly drive them on to acquiring greater and greater mastery over natural products and raw materials. Most of them have harnessed science very successfully to the job of overcoming the impoverishment and desolation caused by the last World War and are busy producing not only formidable weapons of defence but goods and services that make life comfortable and aesthetically pleasant. Nevertheless, while in the socialist countries the average person lives in reasonable comfort as a matter of course, workers in countries like England have to strive hard from time to time to increase their wages and maintain the high living standards they have been able to obtain by collective bargaining.

The citizens of industrialised Europe (Socialist or capitalist) and the USSR have made full use of the miraculous powers science bequeathes to those who are intelligent and skilful enough to grasp its meaning. That is why there appears to be no limit to their demand for a variety of goods and services. People living in London, Moscow, Prague, Berlin and Helsinki etc. want more and more labour saving, artistic and sophisticated goods, aesthetically designed homes and above all a highly organized system of civic amenities. They need museums, art galleries, parks full of entertaining programmes, theatres, operas, cinemas, ballets and lastly,



their television sets, to make life worthwhile after work is over. Again they must have their weekends beside the seashore or high up in the mountains, anywhere away from the city to be able to work harder during the week!

Is there anything wrong or abnormal in wanting all this and more for satisfying their needs? Is it necessary to imagine that there is some extraordinary virtue in denying ourselves the pleasures that the new age of science offers? Judging from the reaction of Asian and African visitors to what these countries have to offer with their vast assemblage of goods and services (industrial and consumer) and the eagerness we exhibit in acquiring them proves the contrary.

If the demand for greater comfort, leisure and culture is a natural demand, then we have to discard many outmoded ideas and inhibitions about what are called rather loosely our "spiritual values". For too long have we in India revelled in the belief that it is only the inward life of a human being that needs to be enriched and that things 'external' are to be despised. Whatever might have been the validity of this attitude or philosophy of life in times long past, if we adhere to them now deliberately, India will be isolated and will stagnate, kept away from the invigorating currents of intellectual and cultural developments. The logic of science and a scientifically organized way of life admits of no compromises. We have to choose between the past and the present without losing any more time. If continuity of certain traditions comes into conflict with our modern requirements they have to be discarded unhesitatingly. Only such norms and values should be adhered to as are capable of adjustment with the new needs and urges of our people.

But there is another side to the canvas of the industrialized world's living conditions. A certain restlessness has seized these people even as they up the ladder of prosperity in leaps and bounds. They are haunted by fears and apprehensions of approaching destruction. The relief and relaxation experienced for about a decade from 1953 is disappearing rapidly as the baying of the American hounds of war began to be heard and the helpless men, women and children of a small Asian country perish under huge bombs. Everywhere from London to Moscow there is a feeling that a dangerous situation is developing as a result of the bar-

barism unleashed by the lords of American imperialism. Those who reject imperialist ideas of "freedom" which apparently mean world domination by America, are being provoked deliberately. Although the perils and consequences of war are fully realized by the progressive people of Europe and the USSR (having lived through its horrors twice before) they are in no mood to submit to the *war mania* of Washington. The Soviet Union and its allies are determined that such wanton violation of the fundamental principle of freedom as in Vietnam must not go unchallenged.

That no one is prepared for a policy of appeasement and surrender, whatever the consequences in terms of human suffering, was made clear at the historic session of the World Congress for Peace held at Helsinki recently. The deepening shadows of the war in Vietnam fell across this inspiring assembly of men and women from far off places. It was a unique gathering of people who shared common beliefs and ideas about how human beings should live and conduct their affairs as civilized people. Individuals and organizations with different views on every aspect of life mingled freely despite their diverse ways of living and functioning. What united all of them, men and women, Europeans and Americans, Africans and Asians was their passionate belief that peace and freedom are indivisible and that both shall and must prevail. They were determined to prevent a handful of men who have mortgaged their conscience and are responding to the most primitive urges, from driving mankind into war with its accompanying evil, violence and hatred. Spokesmen of every delegation including Americans declared in heated debates and discussions their unflinching resolve to rid the world of a system that breeds war, fascism and inequality. Africans in particular denounced not only American imperialism but Salazar, the dictator of Portugal, for suppressing the Angolan and Mozambique peoples' liberation struggles. The identification of these delegates, specially American with the agony of the Vietnamese, was a magnificent demonstration of man's inherent and innate nobility. All were agreed that there must be no yielding to brute force and whatever danger, there would be must be shared in common.

As I sat listening to the speeches of the representatives of North and South Vietnam, and African leaders I was reminded throughout of many of Jawaharlal Nehru's historic pronounce-



ments on war and peace but more specially of what he had said at the Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi a few months prior to the declaration of India's independence. I cannot help quoting that memorable passage where he declared: "We have no designs against anybody; ours is the great design of promoting peace and progress all over the world. Far too long have we of Asia been petitioners in Western courts and chancellories. That story must now belong to the past.... Peace can only come when nations have free and also when human beings everywhere have freedom and security and opportunity. Peace and freedom therefore have to be considered both in their political and economic aspects".

These words have a prophetic ring as they were uttered some years before the birth of the World Peace Movement which later on accepted this concept, not because of Nehru but because it is the only concept of peace consistent with human dignity.

Therefore, not "toothless pacifism" as Chinese leaders choose to refer in their haughty sarcasm to efforts to unite the world's peace forces but "granite teeth" as T. S. Elliot might have called it were what the Helsinki declarations demanded. Despite China's loud proclamations about annihilating imperialism none of the delegations including those of North and South Vietnam were impressed. Her sincerity was questioned because it was commonly known that apart from brave talk very little material assistance had been sent to the scene of action. A witticism that went round was that "the Chinese will fight to the last Vietnamese".

As I come to the end of my letter I wonder if I have conveyed even a fraction of what I wanted to. India and her people are held in high regard by men and women who have suffered the ravages of two global wars and want to end the present state of dangerous tension. They believe, specially the peoples and leaders of the Soviet Union, that we can contribute a great deal to the bringing about of conditions that will end the war in Vietnam and imperialist intervention in Africa and Latin America. They do so because they believe we have decided to be guided by "the wise thought" as they put it of Jawaharlal Nehru. It is for us to decide whether this is so. Have we confidence born of conviction to justify the faith of others in our capacity to play a crucial role in history? These are questions which dare not be baulked any longer.

*Link, August 15, 1965.*

## 36. Havana: Focus of Three Continents

It is a long way to Cuba. Even in this age of spaceships and jet planes it takes an enormous amount of time to reach this enchanting island. Its sunny tempered people, its luxurious tropical landscape, with the blue sea encircling it, Cuba should be an artist's paradise. Maybe that is why Hemingway loved to live and work in this Garden of Eden. But could anyone have in remoter times thought that it would become a veritable rebel's arsenal for the peoples of Latin America?

Time itself goes topsy turvy as the plane drones along from hour to hour soaring ever higher, crossing mighty oceans and the high mountain ranges of many lands. It is, however, an irritating thought that but for America's cordon around Cuba the time and distance separating New Delhi from Havana would be halved. With so many claims upon our time one scarcely relishes the luxury of spending 54 odd hours on travel alone.

As things are today, with the USA waging its cold war against it, Cuba is not quickly accessible to anyone going there, be it for work or pleasure. But then there are so many more serious aspects of this utterly futile and negative approach of those who live and swear by imperialism in America, that strictures and restrictions on travel become the least important. And in any case those who want to visit Cuba manage to do so, American obstruction notwithstanding.

In selecting Havana—"Pearl of the Antilles"—as the venue of the first Tricontinental Conference of Asian, African and Latin American peoples, the sponsors took a calculated risk. The lack of easy means of transport and communication could have been a



discouraging factor, limiting the number of participants to the bare minimum. But even as early as a week before the opening day on January 3, 1966 airplanes coming via Moscow, Madrid and Gander (Canada) were crowding in and unloading delegates, guests, observers and press correspondents round the clock in their hundreds. Men and women from remote lands wearing their colourful national costumes, speaking their different languages, hailing and greeting one another, poured in every day defying every hardship and obstacle.

Fidel Castro's saying, "When men carry the same ideals in their hearts nothing can keep them incommunicado: neither walls of prison nor the God of cemeteries", was borne out by the fact that despite difficulties and barriers so many came to attend this unusually representative assembly.

Since the legend of the Cuban revolution and the hardships it is undergoing are fairly well known, we were taken aback when our hosts placed a shining black Cadillac at our disposal. As it sped across the perfectly asphalted highway and we entered the precincts of the city proper we realized that Havana was a modern city with nothing primitive or underdeveloped about it. An extremely attractive seaside resort, with stately monuments befitting a metropolis and busy and elegant shopping centres, it presents a happy blend of old Spanish and very modern architecture. The young women in smart uniforms controlling the traffic points and whistling their sharp commands and the gaily decorated streets with their banners and bunting, gave Havana a bright and festive look.

By the time we reached the luxurious 22nd floor of the 25-storey Havana Libre Hotel reserved in its entirety for the delegates of the Tricontinental Conference we knew how wrong we were in our ideas about the Batista-led regime and its peculiarities. Its legacy of mansions, palaces, villas, night clubs, gambling houses, and bathing pools in Havana revealed its true nature. The old order had obviously provided everything to satisfy its patrons, America's multi-millionaires to whom exotic Cuba was an ideal place to relax in, recoup and escape. Never could Batista or his bosses have imagined that in their lifetime itself the hotels and houses they had built for themselves would be thrown open to the proletariat and ordinary citizens of Cuba or their guests who in

their respective countries and continents were engaged in bringing about the end of every form of exploitation and oppression.

The elaborateness of the arrangements in terms of equipment for the meeting, the efficiency of interpreter-guides attached to every delegation, and the easy availability of necessary information and reading material indicated that the organizers of the conference had been very careful in their planning which must have involved a tremendous effort. The young leaders of Cuba were obviously anxious to make an impression on not only the tricontinental gathering but also their guests from the Socialist countries of Europe, and since a measure of exhibitionism is natural to youth everyone admired them and despite mental reservations, enjoyed their hospitality.

This spirit of youthfulness seems to permeate the entire Cuban scene. Even though the people are passing through a period of hardships caused by shortages their carefreeness is remarkable. Music fills the air wherever you are, in the massive hotel lifts, in department stores and in city squares. Suddenly in the evenings one comes across a group of people, old and young, swaying to lilted tunes, dancing away in true Spanish abandon, jovial and full of mirth. Looking at the thirty thousand Havanians making merry on New Year's eve in the Plaza de la Revoluc on eating, singing, drinking and dancing, greeting the New Year with streamers and fireworks, one would think they had no woes and worries whatsoever. Another delightful characteristic is their total lack of colour consciousness. Cuban complexions have not only a tricontinental range but many can be mistaken for Europeans.

The new Cuban way of life has a wonderful rallying point in the glamorous Fidel Castro whose sayings are learnt by heart and quoted frequently, to whose speeches the people sway in massed waves, and around whom have grown numerous legends. Idol of the old and young he has endeared himself by not only his valour in the field of battle but the sweeping reforms which have transformed the lives of the peasants, workers and all who were victims of a tyrannical regime. They adore him for the fact that he has no 'home' of his own because he has to be everywhere in Cuba. They dote on him because he sits and talks with students, hotel workers and even housewives. They respect him because he consults the



people and takes their advice in solving difficult problems. They love him because he is so human, so daring, so outspoken and an utterly one of them. They hear him in spellbound silence except when they break it by heaven-rending applause as he thunders from the rostrum.

On the 7th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, when he spoke for over two hours, the people in their thousands responded to every sentiment, and acquiesced with all his proposals for making the Cuban economy self-reliant. This complete identification with the people is Fidel Castro's strongest armour. His popularity is phenomenal precisely because he is completely fearless and has dared to defy America in all her might. The David against Goliath motif holds an appeal all its own and Castro has become the symbol par excellence of a hero whose courage has yet to be matched. I was told repeatedly that if I wanted to understand why Cuba needed a revolution I must read Fidel Castro's historic speech — entitled "History Will Absolve Me" — in which he defended himself at his trial in 1953 and which is regarded as a classic for its scathing denunciation of the Batista dictatorship. I am glad I did so because it sums up very succinctly the anger and hatred of the oppressed of all ages in all lands and explains why the Cubans are so bitter and frenzied in their dislike of America, their suspicion of anyone who talks of peace, their vulnerability to Chinese propaganda about the inevitability of war and armed struggle irrespective of consequences.

As we watched the brilliant choreographical display named "Solidarity" we realized that it was designed to reflect the Cuban belief in the efficacy of armed struggle to the exclusion of all other forms. Every scene was full of vigour and drama, exhibiting a high standard of artistic technique but all the five items — "Solidarity", "Cuba", "Congo", "Latin America" and "Vietnam" — were built on the theme that no struggle, political or social, is possible except in terms of "fight for man through man himself".

The Conference: Seldom have international conferences met for as long as the Havana Conference did. From the original plan to hold it for a week it went on for a full fortnight, preceded by lengthy deliberations of the Preparatory Committee. The nature of the solidarity movement against colonialism and imperialism is well-known by now. Deepening and broadening the development

of struggles is its primary objective. The conference had been summoned to deal with subjects such as colonialism and the problems of Vietnam, Congo, Dominica, Portuguese colonies, South Rhodesia, South Africa, South Arabia and Palestine, as also to discuss what were the most suitable methods of cooperation in economic, social and cultural fields. Hours and hours were, however, spent throughout the three weeks not so much in debates and discussions related to these problems but in refuting the Chinese delegations' attacks against the leaders of the Soviet Union and Soviet policies.

By arrogating to themselves the authority of infallible guides and leaders of the anti-imperialist movements in the world, and by constantly and irrelevantly harping on the Soviet Union's so-called 'surrender' to imperialism the Chinese delegation succeeded in confusing the delegates for some time but not for long. Chauvinism and opportunism, however, have a way of sneaking in even into the most revolutionary of camps and the Chinese exploited such trends most skilfully. Whenever and wherever their political line got defeated they tried to regain a foothold in the organizational sphere. Such an attitude inevitably disrupted solidarity and tended to divide rather than unite the anti-imperialist forces. Instead of focussing attention on the main objectives for which we had met we were always debating and arguing about the relative merits of the Soviet and Chinese points of view. This had a demoralizing effect on many a new comer to the folds of this organization while observers and guests from the socialist countries wondered where all this would lead. At a moment when maximum unity was necessary, a country belonging to the socialist fraternity had chosen to split and divide it by raising irrelevant ideological issues.

The political and organizational conclusions of the conference will inevitably reflect tensions and conflicts created by China which in turn are bound to encourage the very forces the conference of the three continents had set out to challenge.

Despite these depressing aspects the Tricontinental Conference marks the beginning of a new chapter in the long history of the struggles in which the Latin American peoples have engaged themselves. The peoples of this part of the world have resolved to move on and to free their territories and throw out those who have



hitherto trampled upon their rights. The decisions if implemented faithfully and vigorously will inspire the vast brotherhood that met in Havana to heal the divisions within its own camp and emerge as a united force bent upon eliminating the evils of imperialism and war.

Link, January 26, 1960

---

Aruna Asaf Ali led the Indian delegation to the Tricontinental Conference that met in Havana.

## 37. Reflections on the Soviet Union

---

A NEW epoch; the dreams of great men and ancient philosophers come true; a magnificent combination of noble ideals and ruthless action, smashing for all time what had decayed and degenerated in Russian society; the opening up of new dimensions in the history of human relations—these and many such thoughts well up in my mind, jostling incoherently as I write these lines in a hurry, on the eve of my fifth visit to the Soviet Union to participate in the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution.

I have always envied the fortunate generation of adults who in 1917 were in a position to know about this triumphant upheaval and who had the opportunity to understand its historic implications. I did not have the opportunity to meet anyone of our people who actually went to the Soviet Union clandestinely or otherwise, during or soon after the 1917 revolution although I had some faint knowledge about it because those who were supervising my political apprenticeship in the 1930s used to talk about the exploits of V.N. Chattopadhyaya, M.N. Roy, etc., and regaled us with many a daring and romantic account of their doings. These veterans had been to the Soviet Union and had met Lenin and others but there were no books or journals in those days to tell us of the nature of their work. Our own struggle from 1930 onwards was so intense and political literature of a revolutionary nature of any description (specially from Russia) was so difficult to obtain that such authentic knowledge of the October Revolution as I acquired was at a very late stage. My curiosity about socialism as a political concept was roused only after I had read Bernard Shaw's *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* and not because I had read the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* because the lat-



ter was not available in India.

Further, our early mental training and emotional orientation were based mostly on Western ideas of the enlightenment. Nationalism, rationalism, individualism, etc. were the main topics of interest of the intelligentsia, not socialism and much less Communism. When I first read John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook The World*, which was smuggled through to me while I was undergoing my third term of imprisonment in 1941, the great saga of the October Revolution flashed into my consciousness in all its romantic grandeur. Reading that powerful and thrilling story was a memorable experience and awakened in me a desire to know more about Russia and its revolution. However, the clamour and din of our own struggles during the years that followed gave us no respite and all serious reading had to be postponed indefinitely. Strangely enough, such of the literature of the Indian Socialist Movement as came our way never made any compelling impact on us because not only was it meagre in output but was quite irrelevant to the burning issues of the day. For us, average workers in the national freedom struggle, Gandhiji's and Jawaharlal Nehru's writings and speeches were our primary source of intellectual nourishment. To obtain 'higher education' in politics, as I have said earlier, we had to turn mainly to British authors of socialist literature and there also, the authorities took good care to see that nothing which might feed the "subversive" elements came into the book shops. The fortunate few were the 'England returned' youth of those times, but they (with rare and honourable exceptions) forgot their ideological fervour as soon as they returned home. The grim facts of our struggle for freedom confronted them with a cruel choice. Revolutionary, specially Communist, ideas could not be aired as a matter of mere polemics because the British in India would not allow any open debate or campaigns which would question capitalist and imperialist theories or their right to rule over us. There was no possibility in those days of having the best of both worlds. It was a matter of being either for or against imperialist slavery and therefore these young men who were in a position to propagate socialist ideas or talk about the October Revolution had to be discreetly reticent on these subjects.

Thus, regrettable as it is, the fact remains that knowledge of the October Revolution, which was a key event of the century

was denied to the vast majority of our people, when it was needed most urgently. Even Jawaharlal Nehru's book on the Soviet Union and Tagore's *Letters from Russia* never received the widespread publicity they deserved nor were they easily available. Anti-imperialist propaganda of those days was exclusively anti-British in form and content and stopped short with demand for national freedom and independence.

The masses of India were therefore late in waking up to what was happening in the Soviet Union: and they actually became aware of it when its heroic people were attacked by Hitler, when they heard and read of their deeds of unparalleled heroism, their steely courage, their capacity to face long years of privation, and above all their infinite love for their soil. The realisation that the people of the Soviet Union had not only defended their homes and hearths but had simultaneously prevented the destruction of the concept of democracy and socialism the world over came soon after. Had this revolutionary state been destroyed by the Nazi and fascist forces it would have resulted in the triumph of reaction all over the world but this occurred to us because ours was a struggle against imperialism, which manifested itself as the rule of Britain on Indian soil. We were, therefore, not able to grasp the menacing significance of fascism as a deadlier evil during our struggles and conflicts. It was only after the guns of World War II ceased to thunder and the true facts about the political perversion called Nazism were revealed, that we understood the magnitude of its threat to humanity.

While the role of the Soviet Union in defeating fascism earned it the admiration of our masses, forces hostile to it unleashed a subtle though relentless propaganda against what was termed Communist totalitarianism. The cold war leaders of the West recruited their protagonists in India from among classes that were haunted by the fear of Communism. They were frightened lest its ideas gain a foothold in the minds of the hungry millions in India and thereby destroy the power of the privileged classes. Elaborate plans were drawn up, calculated to prevent factual and truthful knowledge about socialism as practised in the Soviet Union, reaching the people and to distort Communist ideals and thereby check their potential popularity with the Indian masses. The virulent anti-Communist propaganda of the cold war period confused



the ranks of our radical-minded intelligentsia, because they were not prepared and properly quipped to resist this onslaught adequately. What contributed to this confusion greatly was the naive opportunism of the Congress Socialist Party. Its leaders allowed themselves to be hypnotised by the writings of *The God That Failed* brand of ex-Communists like Koestler, Louis Fischer and others and became India's most vocal anti-Soviet crusaders. Having acquired prominence during the Quit India struggle of 1949 their mass popularity was an asset for their friends in imperialist countries. Besides, the fact that they functioned as a Socialist group within the Congress and had close association with Indian Communists at one time, made their criticism plausible. They were India's campaigners against the so-called regimented tyranny prevailing in the Soviet Union during the '50s. Every argument in the armoury of American and West European Communist balancers was employed and they did their best to create a false and lurid picture of the Soviet Union's achievements with fantastic distortions regarding the moral and material values on which this socialist state had been established. Suffocated by this atmosphere, I decided to break away from it all and it was on the advice of Jawaharlal Nehru to whom one went in moments of doubt and despair, that I made up my mind to acquaint myself with Marxist literature, and come to an independent conclusion about its validity for a society such as ours.

The search for new moorings is a bewildering experience but very worthwhile. Paradoxical as it might appear, I read the *Communist Manifesto* for the first time during a brief stay in Washington. I was able to discover several very well written reports compiled quite obviously by competent American experts on Communist theory, its origin and as it was practised in the Soviet Union. The arguments against this doctrine and its modern practitioners was so cogently and simply explained that it did not require a great deal of mental effort to understand the truthfulness underlying Marxism and its principles. I had been warned that Marxism was a highly complicated scientific theory, a complex of social and economic laws governing society and that its study required tremendous patience. But the books at my disposal were not at all formidable or difficult. Obviously, these reports were prepared to train propagandists at the elementary level and therefore the subject was simplified to suit beginners. I was fortunate

indeed to have come across this material because it not only whetted my appetite for further study but made me want to visit the Soviet Union and this want became an urgent need with every passing week. I wanted to see for myself how men and women who were inspired by that great hymn of all the exploited of this earth, the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels, were creating a new world for themselves. I wanted to see the system they had adopted whereby the poverty of today could be turned into the wealth of tomorrow.

I had to wait a long while before I could visit the Soviet Union for the first time in 1950. It was a study tour meant to clear up many a utopian confusion and rid me of half-baked ideas of socialism. I was interested in understanding the immediate and ultimate objectives of a socialist order of life, the role of individuals who are not proletarians by birth in the struggle for socialism and the meaning of democracy as a concept of popular government. During my stay of two months in Moscow I had long sessions of discussion with many well-known specialists followed by equally long hours of quiet and occasionally some pleasant sight-seeing. It was one of the most educative periods of my life, after the attainment of independence. I shall always treasure the memories of that visit because it opened up so many avenues of new thought for me.

Even seventeen years ago, the accomplishments of socialism were tremendous, when compared to the primitive conditions of Russia under Czarism. The books I read and the museums I visited revealed the Russia of many revolutions, the devastation caused by the civil war, the colossal losses and the personal suffering of millions during the war against fascism. And today, seventeen years later, when this vast country, freed from the fetters of capitalism reaches its 50th year after victorious workers, peasants and soldiers seized state power, it presents a totally different picture. From a hungry, bare-foot and ill-clad people 50 years ago, Soviet citizens have risen to tremendous heights of achievement in science, technology and culture. So renowned are their accomplishments in every field of human effort that those who used to scoff at them have been silenced. Honest demands that those who had genuine doubts should recognise the fact that the Soviet State and its men and women have succeeded in heralding the



birth of a new renaissance all over the globe, a renaissance for the common man which will release his faculties and energies, and sublimate him in a total sense.

We who live in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are aware that the balance of social forces in our countries are at present tilted in favour of the propertied classes, and we also know that we have to go a long way yet before we can thoroughly renovate the moth-eaten social structure that is our inheritance. But we have, however, not yet realised fully that to revolutionise society we will have to depend on our own strength, mobilise our own will power, our manpower by gathering together and uniting ardent crusaders from every stratum of society if this ennobling cause is to triumph.

A radiant future awaits us if we can steadfastly pursue these goals, even as the revolutionaries of Russia pursued them, because revolutions succeed only when those who have faith resolve never to rest and condemn themselves to hard labour, till the attainment of their goal.

While celebrating the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution I am sure the citizens of the Soviet Union will remember all those who have struggled, suffered and given up their lives because they refused to compromise with tyranny and exploitation.

Even now in many parts of the world innocent men and women are dying in defence of their soil, are being murdered by imperialist butchers as in Vietnam, are resisting the efforts of an aggressor in Arab lands, are struggling against dictators and oppressors as in Latin America and Africa! There are millions who are suffering because they possess neither land nor other means of livelihood in our Asian continent. All these are problems that figure on the agenda of contemporary history. Ours will be a meaningless homage to the revolutionaries who shook the world 50 years ago, if we do not overthrow the forces of exploitation and tyranny.

On this day of rejoicing let us ponder over that profound quotation from Lenin's writings in Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*:

"Man's dearest possession is life, and since it is given to him to

live but once he must so live as not to be scared with the shame of a cowardly and trivial past, so live as not to be tortured for years without purpose, so live that dying he can say: 'All my life and my strength were given to the first cause in the world—the liberation of mankind'."

---

*Link*, November 5, 1967



ter and nobler human beings.

To take the most recent, unlike Gandhiji, Lenin's teachings were not rooted in the religious tradition of Russia, as he was attracted to the revolutionary school of thought founded by Marx and Engels. Nevertheless, his passionate concern for the oppressed, his anxiety to help the victims of tyranny and his desire to liberate those who were suffering helplessly under a vicious social system, invested him with the magnetic appeal of a religious prophet. His legend has grown and not diminished with the passing of years. There are people in every country who accept the validity of his interpretation of history and philosophy. The principles he enunciated for the struggle against imperialism, exploitation and war and his masterly analysis of social history inspire people who even now are fighting against these scourges, which continue to play havoc with human life.

Lenin's supreme contribution to the progress of humanity was the new State which he founded, namely, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, a State which rejected the idea of exploitation in all its forms and thereby opened a new chapter in the history of civilization. When Lenin was born a hundred years ago, Russia was ruled by the Czars the most backward of the world's royal clans, who were entirely controlled by foreign and domestic capitalists and mighty landlords. Their model was the West European State dedicated to imperialism—the most powerful example of which was the British Imperial State. Students of Lenin's life are well aware of the appalling difficulties and adverse circumstances in which he worked for a system that could defeat domestic feudalism and foreign imperialism and establish a new State. Hounded out of Russia he had to spend much of his early life as an exile. In spite of the hardships an emigrant has to suffer, he never gave up the study of history and was constantly engaged in enriching his knowledge of Marxism and all the political and theoretical developments of those times. He was forced to live in exile for many years but was in constant communion with his colleagues and directed the activities of the party from wherever he was.

Lenin never wanted to be just a demagogic preacher of class war and therefore prepared himself by studying and analysing the situation in Russia and elsewhere so that he may instruct his followers in the art of conducting revolutionary struggles in a planned

## 38. Lenin—A Tribute

PANEGYRICS and eulogies are gushing forth from the hearts and minds of millions of people as they begin to celebrate the day on which Lenin was born, a hundred years ago. Continent-wide and countrywide demonstrations of admiration and festivals are being held, where people in their thousands are giving expression to their thoughts and feelings, and are paying their homage to the memory of this phenomenal figure of the 20th century.

Lenin's name is familiar to vast numbers of people, young and old, in many lands because even today, although he died over four decades ago, his deeds and achievements continue to give them the inner strength they need to overcome life's trials and tribulations.

Mankind has endeavoured to be free from age to age and century to century. This urge has led human beings from epoch to epoch out of the anarchy and chaos of ignorance to greater awareness of themselves and the universe, to ever-widening horizons of thought, organization and purposeful activity. In the course of this long march they have experienced many defeats and some triumphs, much suffering and great joy. But humanity's long and exciting search for happiness, its search for spiritual bliss and the good things of life, would not have been so consistently progressive without great leaders and teachers who showed the way by telling people how they should live, what they should think and why they should never yield to evil. Whether it is a Buddha, a Christ, a Gandhi or a Lenin, although they were individuals who acted and talked differently in their contemporary situations, and were born and brought up in different circumstances, their advent changed men's thinking profoundly and made their followers bet-



and organised manner. As a founder of a party of a new type he stressed the need for dedicated and self-sacrificing cadres prepared to fight for the cause and if necessary perish in the fight. Lenin's leadership lay in his tremendous capacity to know the essential nature of the society he wanted to destroy and his ability to take calculated risks against all odds. His historic decision which gave the signal for the storming of the citadels of Russian power in 1917 changed the course of human history and proved the correctness of his comprehensive understanding of the situation.

Lenin realised quite clearly and had come to the conclusion that a new type of political organisation was necessary for mobilising the working classes. He therefore insisted on involving within it the masses who were, according to him, the main levers of revolutionary power. He advised such of his colleagues as were seriously engaged in political activities to devote their energies to the masses because he said "the millions of people will never listen to the advice of parties, if that advice does not fall in with their own experience". He called upon those entrusted with organisational tasks to "learn to approach the most backward, the most undeveloped members of this class, those who are least influenced by our science and the science of life, so as to be able to speak to them, to draw closer to them, to raise them steadily and patiently to the level of Social-Democratic consciousness, without making a dry dogma out of our doctrine—to teach them not only from books, but through participation in the daily struggle for existence of these backward and undeveloped strata of the proletariat". His faith in the capacity of the working class for wresting power from the ruling authorities was rooted in the belief that if organised on these lines it could be an invincible force. The correctness of his understanding was proved not only when the socialist state was established in Russia but later when it put down foreign-provoked civil war and again when it triumphed over fascism.

Lenin carried on a persistent struggle against the opponents of his theory of a tightly-knit compact party of ideologically sincere individuals, because without such a party there was bound to be vagueness where inflexible determination was what was necessary. And yet he advocated the necessity to be in tune with the mass mood always, and adopt tactics and strategy in conformity

with the changing situation. Jawaharlal Nehru noted with admiration the importance Lenin attached to the personal qualities of party members and writes: "Lenin did not care how many people he had with him—he even threatened at one period to stand alone—but he insisted that only those should be taken who were 'whole-hoggers', who were prepared to give up everything for the cause and even do without the applause of the multitude. He wanted to build up a body of experts in revolution who could develop the movement efficiently. He had no use for just sympathisers and fair weather friends".

One could go on enumerating the various aspects of this brilliant intellect and dwell on the marvels of a man who quite early in his life made up his mind to live a revolutionary's life and exhaust himself in the process. He faced endless hardships but never faltered and lived with danger as his lifelong companion. He had the ability to look beyond the horizon and finally led his people out of the prison-house of poverty and suffering. Romain Rolland, the French philosopher, summed up his reading of Lenin's role in history with characteristic clarity when he said that he was "the greatest man of action in our century and at the same time the most selfless".

Gandhi and Lenin: As we in India ponder over the life of this memorable son of Russia who changed the history of his country, who called upon the oppressed of all lands to unite against their oppressors and who dreamt of and worked for world revolution, we are reminded of our own leader Gandhi whose birth centenary almost coincides with Lenin's. Both of them wanted to end the suffering of all who are compelled to starve, they wanted to lighten their burdens and were convinced that wars were a curse and an abomination. Working in very dissimilar circumstances they evolved different techniques for realising their aspirations and both were able to witness the breaking of a new dawn for their people.

Men who become embodiments of noble ideals never die, they live not in monuments of stone and mortar but in fields and factories, in hearts and homes, wherever men and women work and live. Thus with the passage of time Lenin will not be forgotten because the problems that he dealt with await lasting solutions. Lenin's teachings will live because they are needed by the millions



who long for peace, for bread and for freedom. Lenin's memory will endure as long as the citizens of the Soviet Union carry on the struggle against the enemies of the common people, for as long as the citizens of the Soviet Union and their socialist State live up to his glowing ideals.

---

*Link*, April 19, 1970

## 39. Three Decades of Friendship

---

My span of life has extended now into three quarters of a century. There are therefore large gaps in what I remember of the years and years that have gone by. And yet certain impressions are stamped in my mind as if with some luminous paint. They glow even now with almost the same brilliance as they did when the events occurred. Some of my most vivid memories are those associated with Jawaharlal Nehru and after him Indira. Although I have never claimed or aspired to belong to their inner and intimate circles, I have been one of a group of men and women whose minds were attuned to theirs. Jawaharlal Nehru attracted us and evoked our response even though he was considerably older, because he stirred our minds and excited our emotions and gave us a thought-provoking frame of reference which was relevant to our times. The historical sweep of his mental outlook was one of the factors that attracted me and satisfied my hunger to know and understand our own history and get glimpses of the world's history. It also enabled one to grasp the significance of the currents and cross currents of contemporary events of the 20th century. Therefore my way of thinking was shaped by him in a very vital sense, particularly in obtaining knowledge of the Soviet Union. His writings and speeches about what had happened there after 1917, his replies and explanations in response to my innumerable questions regarding the anti-Soviet and anti-communist propaganda raging in certain Indian and Western socialist circles, were utterly frank, unbiased and objective. He used to say that he did not believe in a purely negative attitude. Even his doubts about the ethical implications of the post-Lenin developments in the Soviet Union were free from malice and were qualified with statements which



implied that in the given historical and social context in which Marxism and Leninism had to be applied, compromises were perhaps inevitable. One should not dogmatise about anything that has happened in Soviet Russia, he once remarked.

It was therefore natural that, despite his critics, free India under Nehru's leadership established friendly relations with the Soviet Union in 1947. I remember the eloquent speeches in which he unfolded the outlines of his foreign policy.

During his visit to the USA in 1949 he realised that its approach to India was not based on acceptance of India as a free and sovereign country which aimed at uprooting all the vestiges of colonial domination and building a self-reliant economy. Jawaharlal Nehru's ideal of friendship among nations was based on mutual cooperation among them in economic, cultural and other spheres on the basis of equality. He wanted to establish the essential requirements for developing India as an industrial power. Therefore when in 1949 American leaders expressed their reluctance and inability to assist in attaining India's objective, such hopes as Jawaharlal Nehru had about the land of free enterprise and democracy evaporated.

In contrast, when the Soviet Union extended its friendship and Jawaharlal Nehru received an affectionate and jubilant welcome during his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1955 as Prime Minister of India, he found a practical confirmation of his faith in Socialism as a liberating force. He grasped the hand of friendship extended by the Soviet Union and commenced the journey to his cherished goal of industrialising and modernising India. At the conclusion of his memorable visit in 1955 with young Indira by his side, he was so moved and overwhelmed by the people's loving ovation that he declared before returning to India that he was leaving a little bit of his heart in the Soviet Union.

This happened full 30 years ago. During these three decades India has had no cause for any complaint. It has received generous help from its socialist neighbour. The recently released three-hour documentary "Nehru" tells the story of Indo-Soviet friendship and cooperation and its vitalising impact on our economy as well as our mutual concern for each other's well being. Peaceful coexistence as defined by Nehru is not just a platitude. It continues to be the cornerstone of Indian foreign policy. There has never been a

turning back on the principle that, notwithstanding our differences with other countries in social and political beliefs and practices, there shall be no attempts to interfere in each other's national way of life.

Why am I dwelling on thoughts such as these? Perhaps for a variety of reasons. First of all, the world is observing the 40th anniversary of the end of a war during which, while it lasted from 1941 to 1945, humanity went through its most agonising years. Years when the human values of civilized living were massacred by blood-thirsty Nazi hordes. Millions upon millions of men, women and children perished as insane hounds lusting for world domination over-ran vast territories in Europe. I cannot help recalling Jawaharlal Nehru's intense and burning desire to resist this menace. His impassioned denunciation of fascism, his impatience with the Western powers because they hesitated to launch an offensive against the enemies of mankind, the anger that welled in him at the Indian people's helplessness and inability to join the crusade—these are for me unforgettable memories.

We as a people shared with Nehru his anguish when we heard that the Nazi armed forces were poised to crush and defeat the U.S.S.R. we also shared his elation when Hitler's army was thrown back by the heroic, death defying Soviet soldiers who rid their soil of the aggressors and liberated their country.

We were fortunate because his only offspring, his beloved Indira, came forward to carry on the tasks he could not complete. And in doing so, Indira as Prime Minister encountered obstacles which often challenged the basics of the Nehru legacy. She stood most valiantly the pressures from unfriendly directions to take the country back. Had she not resisted these pressures with steadfastness and once again, like her father, grasped the hand of friendship extended by the Soviet leadership, our freedom would have been in peril.

Indira Gandhi knew that the vast gatherings of men and women who greeted her during her numerous visits to the Soviet Union were reaffirming their love for her countrymen and their wish for the prosperity and happiness of India. Their tender sentiments, their affectionate gestures and much else were reminiscent of the scenes she had witnessed when she accompanied her father in 1955. And all through the years when Indira Gandhi



functioned as India's Prime Minister the Soviet leadership never faltered, though their friendship for our country was put to test time and again in moments of crisis. And finally after the signing of the treaty of friendship and cooperation the Soviet Union felt it was duty bound to give full support to India at every level and in whatever way India needed such assistance. Throughout Indira Gandhi's momentous career as a leader of the Indian people, she was internationally known as an opponent of imperialism and its manifestations and a firm supporter of world peace of the socialist countries, and of leaders of liberation movements in every continent. It is well to recall all this because even though Indira Gandhi is no longer physically with us, her spirited personality endures. The new leader our people have elected in her place is none other than a person who has the privilege to inherit her whole being both physically and mentally.

Rajiv Gandhi is fully aware of this legacy. The teeming millions of India, specially those who are yet to gain their opportunities and privileges, have acknowledged his leadership because they believe that Rajiv Gandhi, the successor of Nehru and Indira, will make their dreams a reality of life. This is an awesome responsibility which history has placed on him.

Rajiv Gandhi will be visiting several world capitals in the coming months. And wherever he goes he will be received with respect. But when he goes to the Soviet Union as India's Prime Minister the leaders and people of that country are sure to welcome him with open arms and with hearts full of love and esteem. He will be representing a country and a people for whom Soviet leaders and citizens have a special corner in their hearts.

Rajiv Gandhi is just about to complete four months since he received an overwhelming mandate from the people in the elections held in December 1984. But in these few weeks he has given sufficient indications that he is earnest about carrying forward the policies, plans and programmes of his predecessors. On every issue involving decisions that concern those who continue to be held in bondage, he has pledged his support. He has declared in no uncertain terms that India will work for the liberation of the peoples of South Africa, Namibia, Nicaragua and others in the struggle against imperialism, neo-colonialism and those who threaten to destroy the world in a nuclear confrontation.

Under its new leader India will champion the cause of the oppressed, and of those who want world peace to be a fact of life before this century comes to a close.

Those of us who have been privileged to have Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru as our guides who gave us our first lessons in patriotism and internationalism, have one ardent desire; to see the people of our country unitedly marching forward to attain the goal of a sovereign India, sincere in its determination to banish want and hunger, and fearlessly independent.

---

Speech in Moscow on a visit in 1985.



## 40. Two Significant Anniversaries

It is indeed a privilege for me to speak at this unique gathering. Assembled here are women who represent both governments and people's organizations, who have come from various parts of our common homeland, this, our precious and beautiful planet, Earth.

We are meeting in the land of Lenin during the 70th anniversary year of the Great October Revolution. We in India, the land of Gandhi and Nehru, are observing this year the 40th anniversary of National Independence. The inspiring lives of these great leaders, and the spirit of Lenin, Gandhi and Nehru, I hope, will permeate this august assembly.

Born within a year of each other, Gandhi and Lenin, both had a burning desire for the liberation of humankind from all shackles, including the invisible, yet enfeebling fetters of obscurantist ideas. The hopes of Lenin and Gandhi for humanity were the same, though one was inspired by scientific socialism of Karl Marx and the other by humanist precepts of Leo Tolstoy. Both Gandhi and Lenin wanted to see the end of the evils which plague the world—predatory wars, colonial oppression and exploitation and poverty existing in many countries and societies.

Jawaharlal Nehru, architect of modern India, was influenced by both Gandhi and Lenin. Like them for him also, emancipation of women was an integral part of human liberation. Our Constitution and laws confer equal rights upon Indian women. This was Nehru's notable contribution in the social sphere. In international relations, Nehru advocated peaceful coexistence between different social and political systems and built the edifice of non-alignment on their foundation. During the fifties, many of us regarded this as the dream of a visionary. However, within our life-

time peaceful coexistence and nonalignment have become vital and vibrant concepts. And the Delhi Declaration, issued jointly by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in November 1986, marked the historic confluence of the three streams represented by Lenin, Gandhi and Nehru.

The World Congress of Women convened by the WIDF is meeting here in Moscow, the Capital of the Soviet Union, for the second time. This Congress is a living demonstration of the spirit of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. The participants belong to different races, speak a variety of languages, profess different faiths and ideologies, and belong to different political systems. Yet we all share common anxieties and hopes.

We have been drawn here by our intense concern that a nuclear war should not make this earth, on which we are all fellow passengers, incapable of sustaining human life. We also cherish the desire to create conditions in which women can work with men, on terms of complete equality, to build a better and peaceful future for our younger generations.

May this World Congress demonstrate to the vast majority of peace loving humankind, the inherent strength of women, who can no longer be ignored or treated as second class citizens.

May this World Congress serve notice to those who engage in nuclear brinkmanship, that our Mother Earth shall not perish!

I would like to say, in conclusion, to my young friends here: how confident I feel, as I meet and talk to the younger people, that the torch which my generation is passing on to the new generation, will be safe in their hands and will be carried forward with a new determination. You have many more miles to go. We stand today at the threshold of a new century.

I am certain that the light of human liberation will burn even brighter, as the world steps into the 21st century. In the end, let me thank the Soviet Women's Committee for their warm hospitality.

Thank you, for your kind attention.

---

Speech at the World Congress of Women in Moscow, held from 23rd to 27th June, 1987.



---

---

## PART IV

### RADIANT PERSONALITIES

---

---



## 1. Gandhiji: Some Reminiscences

---

MEMORIES are like the scent that survives the rose. They remain buried under the debris of time but can always be sought out to revive the past and its images. With every passing year the capacity to feel and learn becomes duller and duller and the desire to linger in the corridors of the past becomes at times an obsession. Every year on the anniversary of Gandhiji's birth and death this urge to look back seizes such of us as had the rare fortune of basking in the sunshine of his affection.

But it is not quite so easy to write as to ruminate about those times. To communicate what was significant in the events that brought insignificant beings into the orbit of Gandhiji's living faith requires a capacity for perseverance, a quality that is alien to my temperament. But the only consoling thought lies in the fact that that however unimportant and personal the incident, the fact that it was woven around 20th-Century India's most compelling personality, will be of some interest to the readers.

I still cannot help experiencing the teenager's thrill of reading out a welcome address to Gandhiji on behalf of Delhi's citizens in the year 1930 at a time when I had no political existence and my understanding of politics was shockingly elementary. Fortunately for me, the Delhi Congress of those years could not agree upon anyone else because of sharp internal divisions. The Gandhi Ground was a packed mass of humanity, and as Gandhiji walked up to the khadi-draped dais deafening cries of 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai' rent the air. After the garlanding ceremony was over, I read out the printed address. The era of loudspeakers had yet to arrive and I am not very sure if more than a thousand persons could hear me.



Gandhiji spoke for about half an hour and no one in that vast multitude uttered a sound as they sat listening to him. His halting speech, in broken Hindi-Urdu sentences, his gentle mannerisms and quiet exposition of freedom's cause was more a talk than a piece of oratory. It was devoid of all the sophisticated flourishes of polished Persianised Urdu to which Delhi audiences were accustomed in those days. He could not sway them with quotations from Ghalib or Bahadur Shah Zafar and yet he held their attention. Despite the absence of loudspeakers, his soft voice carried the stern message of struggle to that vast assembly of men and women. Their repeated applause in unison was proof enough that the people had understood him. Their subsequent behaviour proved that they were ready to act in accordance with his behest.

I never recovered from the elation and surprise of that first encounter, because it was an utterly unreal and dreamlike experience. The importance of not being important has its own reward, I realised much later; otherwise could I ever have aspired to get so close to Gandhiji? This purely accidental contact with someone who could only have been worshipped from afar, as far as I was concerned, made me think. I had to be worthy of the opportunity to deserve the honour done to me by our kind though quarrelsome leaders.

By the time I met him later again in Delhi I had grown up a little (politically). This was soon after the Gandhi-Irwin pact had been signed and the jail gates thrown open as a result. He had to take note of me because there had been some dispute about my release. It had been held up by a week or more because the Delhi authorities were inclined to classify me as one who had indulged in preaching 'violence'. Since persons convicted for making inflammatory speeches were excluded from the terms of the Pact concerning the release of political prisoners, I was not released along with the others. Gandhiji was, I think, intrigued and wanted to know whether I had really incited people to deviate from the path of non-violent non-cooperation, as he was anxious to know whether the British were honest about implementing the Pact. I had to confess to him that having recently read Savarkar's book on the Indian struggle for Independence in 1857, I could not help being influenced by it and did refer to it quite often in my speeches.

I am not quite sure if he appreciated my point of view. Subsequently, however, many years later, emboldened by a series of events, I had occasion to argue with him about the ethics of means and ends.

We never spared Gandhiji and took every problem to him even though we knew that he could barely snatch a few hours for sleep. On one of his visits to Delhi in the Thirties he had to detain at Faridabad. This was often done because the milling crowds that gathered at railway stations tired him out and his medical advisers used to caution local Congress organisations against strenuous routine. Acharya Kripalani, the late Farid-ul-Huq Ansari and a few others, including Mr G. D. Birla, had also gone to Faridabad. We walked on either side of Gandhiji. I remember complaining to him about discrimination against women in the matter of nominations to the PCCs. He was quite emphatically of the view that we must resist injustice and not allow ourselves to be bullied. Acharyaji had his usual humorous but sarcastic dig at our expense but Gandhiji said quite seriously that women must not be overwhelmed by their natural shyness and should put up a stiff fight for their rightful place in the Congress.

The oppressed could always count on his sympathy and support. I believe that we, women, and his Harijans were uppermost in his mind when he spoke against our evil social customs.

Such personal anecdotes of thousands of Indians would reveal how in his simple and sincere way he gave everyone who drew near him a feeling of mutual belonging. His catholic mind never rejected off hand a viewpoint he could not accept. The debate about the efficacy of violence fascinated him.

But he never insisted on anyone acting against his better judgement. When I wanted to report to him about the happenings in the Quit India struggle of 1942 he invited me to Poona knowing full well that I would 'if discovered' be a British prisoner. He took full note of every aspect of the struggle but disagreed about most of the measures that had led to severe repression. His point was that nothing should be attempted without weighing fully the consequences of such action on the mass morale.

As darkness fell I slipped into his room. Gandhiji's tender concern about my health and safety and his appeal to give up the life of a fugitive lightened my self-imposed burdens. Later he wrote to



me.

"You can't hurt me without hurting yourself. I laugh and invite you to share my laughter 'O ye, of little faith!' You lose patience quickly because you misread me. Have I not said 1945 is not 1942? Yet I have not changed because you find that I am not covering myself with woollen shawls or even at all. Wait, watch and pray".

Some time after when the British Viceroy and Gandhiji were negotiating a solution I was suddenly summoned by him. He wanted me to accompany him and meet the Mountbattens because he wanted them to hear for themselves the insistence of the 'August' socialists on their demand that the British must withdraw unconditionally. I was quite irritated because I just did not know why I should be picked upon to be the spokesman of the group. My hesitation and irritation hurt him. But all he said was, "I told them that you are in my pocket and that I can always take you with me." I could not resist this appeal and very solemnly and apprehensively accompanied him.

Lady Mountbatten was a very intelligent conversationalist and I was quite surprised at meeting someone who spoke so forthrightly. Whether Gandhiji's purpose in taking me along with him was served or not I could never know because soon afterwards I had to go to the USA. He wanted me to go, not merely to recoup my health but to bring about austerities in the Indian Embassy in Washington!

Throughout the six months I was there he was in torment because these were the months when fratricidal conflicts had brought out the bestial in us. I was seized by a nameless restlessness by the end of December 1947 and decided to return to India. As I was waiting for my plane in snowbound New York came the news of his end. The man who wanted to "hug all humanity in friendly embrace" was killed by his own kith and kin. The unbelievable had happened. The conscience of a nation was silenced. But his ageless message of peace is heard wherever wars are being waged.

*Link, October 2, 1966*

How relevant is Gandhiji and his message in 1969, the year that has seen men circling round the moon and walking in and out of spaceships, far away from the earth and its problems? Is he relevant for technologically and industrially backward areas of the world and yet irrelevant for countries where the scientific revolution has brought into existence a new order of men and women? Such questions should rouse our curiosity because it happens to be the hundredth year of his birth. Has a man of faith whose beliefs are not backed by scientific knowledge and the assurance it breeds any place in an age in which every aspect of human conduct is determined by awe-inspiring computer calculations and their mysterious ramifications?

But what was Gandhiji's "faith"? Can it be defined as mere acceptance of "beliefs in spite of evidence", a rejection of the rational or spurning of man's objective knowledge of himself and his environment, mere flabby piety and the blind worship that traditional religion prescribes? If that sums up "faith" and Gandhiji propagated such faith, then quite obviously his life and teaching are utterly valueless and totally meaningless for those who want human beings to respond to all that is challenging in life on this earth and beyond.

His beliefs, however, had nothing to do with a set of dogmas or a static view of man and his social destiny. Otherwise, how could he have cast such a phenomenal spell over his compatriots and become a source of strength for the millions? By daring them to act regardless of consequences, by urging upon them again and again to overcome their intellectual, social and moral lethargy, Gandhiji rejected Indian obscurantism in all its manifestations. As if overnight, "he became a symbolic expression of the confused desires of the people" asking them to "be free", "be slaves no more", trying to tell them that liberation from spiritual thralldom is essential if they are to attain freedom from Imperialist thralldom.

Those who have studied Gandhiji's writings and worked with him are aware that by laying stress on the need to "spiritualise" politics he was in reality laying emphasis on the need for making his people realise that not intellect alone but the moral values of goodness and truth were necessary for strengthening their character, because thus only could human beings be instrumental in winning back their lost heritage. As Nehru has



written, Gandhiji was convinced that it was only through "non-violent upheaval, to be generated within the soul itself" that we as a people could get back our backbone.

There were occasions when many of the younger generation misunderstood Gandhiji's emphasis on character building, his insistence on work for village and Harijan welfare and such activities as lacked what they considered, any revolutionary "appeal". Often they scoffed at his vague utopianism, which struck them as nothing more than a colourless version of 18th century humanitarianism. He was misunderstood for his stress on eschewing retaliations and avoiding bitter thoughts even when angered by extreme provocation.

They were suspicious of this "softness" to the opponent and often questioned his determination to liquidate British rule! This superficial view of Gandhian ethics was particularly fashionable among the more westernised of our young people specially those who had come back from European universities with a smattering of revolutionary thought. Their inadequacy in grasping the essentials of the Indian social scene gave them a confused and distorted sense of values. Otherwise they would have plunged into the freedom struggles of the 30s and 40s in overwhelming numbers and helped Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru in organising the vast amorphous masses in fields and factories on a class basis.

Jawaharlal Nehru was an exception. Europeanised intellectual though he was, he could not keep back from any movement initiated by Gandhiji. He has in eloquent language described how exciting it was to live, move and work with the roused masses. As civil disobedience led him and thousands of Indians to prison repeatedly, those who participated in these struggles were unable to accept the theory that these methods were not revolutionary and therefore futile. Nehru, in other words never doubted the revolutionary integrity of Gandhi although he disagreed with him on several momentous occasions. The criticism that the philosophy and technique of non-violence was essentially counter-revolutionary was rejected by him totally and he said that "in spite of its negative name...it was the very opposite of a meek submission to a tyrant's will". After hearing Gandhiji's explanations and pleadings for the adoption of non-violent non-co-operation as the only form of practicable struggle in India, Nehru wrote: "The way

he pointed out was hard and difficult, but it was a brave path, and it seemed to lead to the promised land of freedom. Because of that promise we pledged our faith and marched ahead".

For twenty-two years we the people of India have lived free of external control at least in the sense that we are not ruled by a foreign bureaucracy; nor is there an alien army of occupation on our soil. Gandhiji's voice was silenced twenty-one years ago and with him vanished the moral imperative to remain within the framework of strictly non-violent action. And yet the politically awakened sections of our people have by and large continued to use the forms and methods he used. The new leaders of the people have not so far been able to think of substitutes to the earlier methods of struggle.

India's new young intelligentsia of the post British period has been unable to make an impact as yet on the minds and hearts of the people of our country. Can this be because they have not been given an opportunity to assimilate the experience and teachings of Gandhiji-Nehru and other leaders of the immediate past? Is it because they are living in an atmosphere in which trivial things, intrigues and manoeuvres prevail and those who are interested in trying to make this country and the world a better place to live in are disunited and therefore weak? To perform the historic task of our times effectively we need without doubt fresh thinking and new forms of action. But when fashioning their new tools our new leaders have to take care not to discard everything that belongs to the Gandhiji-Nehru era. Their thought and action will continue to be relevant for as long as the existing poverty of thought persists. Without an organic comprehension of social development there can be no meaning in any social action. Gandhiji had acquired an understanding of the conditions that confronted him as he grew into maturity and as a result of keeping constant watch on himself and his social and political environment. A hundred years hence his solutions for civilising human beings may become obsolete but then none would have been happier than he himself because his mission was always to create the self-confident individual who does not need either leaders or even stereotyped system.

---

*Link, January 26, 1969.*



## 2. My Discovery of Nehru

*"The last great opportunity of forging an alliance of the left with progressive forces in the Congress was thrown away in 1953 when Jayu Prakash Narayan laid down rigid preconditions instead of responding positively to Jawaharlal's invitation to him to join the Government. There was no reason for Jawaharlal making this generous overture, except to hasten the country's progress towards socialism, since the Congress party enjoyed a massive majority in the Lok Sabha."*

IN an article contributed to *Asia* magazine of America (June 1936), Jawaharlal Nehru said: "It is curious how one cannot resist the tendency to give an anthropomorphic form to a country. Such is the force of habit and early associations. India becomes Bharat Mata, Mother India, a beautiful lady, very old but very youthful in appearance, sad-eyed and forlorn, cruelly treated by aliens and outsiders, and calling upon her children to protect her".

Adopting this image, one might say that during the two decades from 1869 to 1889 Mother India gave birth to a remarkable brood of sons and daughters who would deliver her from foreign thralldom.

Consider the roll of honour (and the list is by no means exhaustive). 1869: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi; 1875: Vallabhbhai Patel; 1878: C. Rajagopalachari; 1879: Sarojini Naidu; 1880: M.A. Ansari; 1882: Subramania Bharati and Bidhan Chandra Roy; 1883: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar; 1884: Rajendra Prasad; 1886: Rameshwari Nehru and Muthulakshmi Reddi; 1887: S. Satyamurti and Govind Ballabh Pant; 1888: Maulana Azad, S. Radhakrishnan and M. Asaf Ali; 1889: Jawaharlal Nehru and



*With Jawaharlal Nehru*



Acharya Narendra Deva.

This stellar cluster reminds me of another passage from Jawaharlal Nehru. He wrote in *Glimpses of World History* about "how, in the lives of nations, periods of brilliant life come and go. For a while they brighten up everything and enable the men and women of that period and country to create things of beauty. People seem to become inspired". The Gandhi-Nehru years were such a period in India's history. I have often remarked to friends that my greatest good fortune was to have been born when I was born...so that I grew up when the country was aglow with the light radiated by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru; and to have married the man whom I married—it was Asaf Sahab who broadened my mental horizons beyond English literature which had been my only enthusiastic interest as a Convent-educated student.

I have been asked many a time, specially by young persons, when it was that I first met Jawaharlal. It will be more accurate to speak of the first occasion when I saw him.

It was early in the winter of 1928, in Delhi. I was nineteen at the time. Asaf and I, who had married a few weeks earlier, in September, were invited to dinner by Brijlal Nehru and his wife, Rameshwari, at their residence on Clive Road (now Tyagaraja Marg). Brijlal, a nephew of Motilal Nehru, wanted us to meet his uncle and his cousin, Jawaharlal, who were on a visit to Delhi and were staying with him.

Though my husband was of the same age as Jawaharlal, he was equally well acquainted with Motilal Nehru, and was a practising lawyer, unlike Jawaharlal who never developed a serious interest in the profession in which his father had attained high fame and wealth. Asaf often met Motilal Nehru, whom he esteemed as a towering senior both in public life and in the legal profession. This was the background to the Establishment Nehru of Delhi inviting us to meet his seditious clansmen from Allahabad.

As we waited for Jawaharlal's return from a speaking tour of some Punjab towns, the conversation was mainly between Motilal Nehru and my husband, because they were temperamentally akin in their political views, both favouring participation in the legislatures to advance the national cause. Suddenly Motilalji stopped in the middle of the conversation to enquire 'Chote Saab Aagaye'?



and instructed the domestics to keep hot water ready for the young master's bath.

At last Jawaharlal burst in, all covered with dust. He barely glanced in our direction as he went quickly in for a wash and change. He must have thought it was the usual evening gathering of some of the Capital's Anglicised elite who were his cousin's colleagues and friends.

### DAZZLED

I was introduced to Jawaharlal on his joining us for dinner, and was dazzled by the first close view of him. Jawaharlal looked me up and down with amused curiosity. I might well have struck him as a dolled-up slip of a girl, destined to decorate drawing rooms.

It was with very little comprehension that I followed the conversation during and after the dinner.

In spite of acquiring some political knowledge from reading and talks with my husband I was hardly prepared for following the proceedings at the Congress Session in December 1929 at Lahore which I attended. Jawaharlal's election as Congress President earlier that year, when he was only 40, made him one of the youngest to hold the office.

The Lahore Congress was a thrilling spectacle. Jawaharlal, smartly dressed in a black sherwani, rode to the venue of the session on a magnificent white horse at the head of the presidential procession. He looked every inch the knight errant of the freedom movement. Some of us gathered roses and narcissi and presented them to the youthful and winsome Rashtrapati. (That was how the Congress president was referred to till India became a sovereign republic with the head of the State designated as Rashtrapati).

On the last day of the year 1929, at the approach of midnight, Mahatma Gandhi moved a resolution at the Lahore Congress defining the Congress objective as complete independence as opposed to Dominion Status. It was adopted amidst deafening applause. The next morning on New Year's Day 1930, Jawaharlal unfurled the national flag on the bank of River Ravi. As the tricolour fluttered in the breeze, the poet's lines coursed through my

mind:

*"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
to be young was very heaven."*

The Independence resolution authorised the Congress leadership to forge the sanctions, through civil disobedience, for realising the objective. Gandhiji decided to base the civil disobedience movement on non-payment of the tax on salt. It was a tax which even the poorest had to pay even though salt was a basic need and a free gift of nature.

I went through my baptism of fire during the Salt Satyagraha, and was imprisoned in 1930 and again in 1932. In 1941 I courted arrest during the Individual Satyagraha which was launched in protest against India being dragged, as a colony, into Britain's war that was claimed to be in defence of democracy. During these years I was a typical *desh sevika* or a volunteer in the national cause, compelling augestingly with the call given by the Congress Working Committee from time to time. It was in 1942, after the All India Congress Committee adopted the Quit India resolution in Bombay and the British authorities rounded up all Congress leaders at one fell swoop in the early hours of 9 August, that I first exercised my own political judgement. I was not sure whether Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru would approve, but I adopted as my guideline Gandhiji's injunction: 'Do or Die'.

### FLAG UNFURLED

Maulana Azad was to have hoisted the national flag at the Gowalia Tank maidan in Bombay on the morning of 9 August. Instead, he was under arrest as I found when I accompanied my husband, who was arrested along with other members of the Working Committee, in a police taxi to Victoria Terminus—on his way to an unknown destination. After the train left I decided on an impulse that I would go to the Gowalia Tank maidan and announce to the people the arrest of the leaders. The police ordered the crowd to disperse. Not wanting the flag to remain unfurled, I rushed up to the dais in a defiant mood, quickly pulled the string to unfurl the flag and told the gathering about the arrest of the national leaders. Few knew my identity. Some thought that the girl with plaited hair was a college student from Delhi. Hardly had the



flag been unfurled when the police lobbed tear-gas shells into the crowd. The assembled men and women ran helter-skelter with tears streaming from their eyes. Among them was Indira Gandhi, though I was not aware of it at the time. "I had my first experience of a tear-gas attack at the flag-hoisting ceremony," she recalls in *Remembered Moments*.

The experience of that morning made me decide that I would not once again tamely enter jail by offering *Satyagraha*. The people were indignant and roused at the arrest of the leaders, and indignation should find organised expression in such a forceful manner that the alien rulers would have no option but to Quit India. This was also the feeling of several other delegates who had come to the A.I.C.C. meeting. These comprised Congress socialists mainly but included several Gandhians like R.R. Diwaker and Sucheta Kripalani. We all felt that the savage repression let loose by the British occupation forces against the spontaneous protest at the arrest of the national leaders should be canalised into organised resistance, on the lines of the underground movement of the partisans of freedom in Nazi-occupied Europe. I told myself that our action was in consonance with the spirit of the Quit India resolution which called for a "mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale" and which also said: "A time may come when it may not be possible to issue instructions or for instructions to reach our people. When this happens, every man and woman who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide".

Both on the underground Congress radio and in our illegally circulated literature we were careful to draw a distinction between planned dislocation of Britain's imperialist war effort, on the one hand, and senseless destruction—as by latter-day terrorists—of lives and property. It is remarkable that though some like white Gandhians, more loyal to non-violence than the Mahatma, turned up their noses at us during and after the Quit India movement, neither Gandhiji nor Jawaharlal Nehru disowned us.

#### BEWILDERED

When I emerged from underground life early in 1946 following

cancellation of the warrant for my arrest, I was bewildered by the spectacle of Congress leaders negotiating with the British rulers to enter the Viceroy's Executive Council in the company of the Muslim League. It seemed to me a betrayal of the cause for which they had given the best years of their lives, and for which we of the younger generation had fought in the Quit India movement. My association with socialist colleagues during the underground years had radicalised my outlook on social and economic problems. I could not see how the Congress could bring about any fundamental change within the structure of the British colonial establishment. Then came the final blow: acceptance of the continent's partition as the price of independence, because of the Hindu-Muslim riots which swept northern India following the Muslim League's 'direct action' in Calcutta in August 1946. I felt dazed, as Jawaharlal and many others must have felt when Gandhiji terminated the non-cooperation movement of the twenties following an outbreak of mob violence at Chauri Chaura. I would take my doubts and my criticism to Jawaharlal. He found time, in the midst of the political drama in which he was a principal actor, to hear me patiently and to explain the compulsions of the situation as he saw them.

I also gave public expression to my anguish in a series of articles in *Janata*, the weekly founded and edited by Edatata Narayanan. These outpourings of mine, in which I raised many questions without even attempting to answer them, were trenchantly critical of the Congress leadership. Yet, when Achyut Patwardhan arranged for the publication of the articles in book form in 1947, Jawaharlal contributed a foreword which was not only generous to me personally but showed his extraordinary capacity for sympathetic understanding of those who differed from him.

It was also a testament of his faith in the capabilities of Indian womanhood. "Among the many strange things that have happened in India during this quarter of a century," he wrote, "perhaps the most notable is the emergence of Indian womanhood. Large numbers of Indian women have played an important role in our struggle for freedom. Many of them have stood out by their ability, capacity for organisation and self-sacrifice for a cause. Some of them can be ranked very high in any assembly of women all over the world. This fact, more than any other, demonstrates



the renaissance of the Indian people and the strong foundations on which we have built our movement for freedom."

I would take to Jawaharlal not only my doubts and questions about a transfer of power negotiated with the British rulers on the basis of India's partition but the polarisation in international relations after the Second World War. I could understand Winston Churchill's anti-Sovietism, but why did Indian socialists seem to echo his Iron Curtain speech at Fulton? Was the Soviet Union a vast prison house as its detractors alleged?

Jawaharlal advised me to go to Soviet Russia and see for myself. But before that he said, I would do well to spend some time in London, study the history of the socialist and communist movements at the British Museum Library, and discuss the subject with knowledgeable persons like V.K. Krishna Menon and his friends of the British Left.

I did not know at the time that in advising me to visit Russia, Jawaharlal wanted me to go through the same kind of education that he had envisaged for his daughter. It was many years later that I found in the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* his letter of 9 July, 1941 in which he tells Indira: "I had hoped that after your formal education at a university was completed, you might supplement it by some travel in various countries.... I wanted you to go to Russia to see things there for your self.... Then with this background of mental training and a wider culture I expected you to return to India and discover the fascinating thing that is India".

#### VISIT TO RUSSIA

Early in 1950 I applied for an entry visa for my first visit to the Soviet Union. It took quite some time coming. Jawaharlal, refusing to be provoked by the rude things that were being said about him and Gandhiji at that time by Soviet commentators, had sent Dr Radhakrishnan to Moscow as India's second ambassador. Krishna Menon was our High Commissioner in London. Both Dr Radhakrishnan and Krishna Menon tried to help expedite the visa, but what clinched the issue appears to have been Jaya Prakash Narayan's reference, at a socialist party convention in Madras, to my criticism of the socialists for their dilution of Marxism.

I sailed from England to Leningrad in the company of D.N.

Pritt, the noted British jurist and Marxist, and his wife, Maria Frances. I was greatly impressed by much of what I saw in the Soviet Union—the eradication of destitution and reduction in disparities, the equal participation of women in all sectors of post-war reconstruction, and the care lavished on children and their education. But I did not hesitate to tell the academicians, A.M. Dyakov and Balabuchevich, who were assigned to act as my intellectual guides, that the Soviets were quite wrong in their negative assessment of Mahatma Gandhi and of Jawaharlal Nehru.

The soundness of Jawaharlal's judgement in sending Dr Radhakrishnan to Moscow was soon vindicated. The philosopher-statesman's patient and persuasive presentation of India's position, and the Indian Government's peace-oriented initiatives in relation to the Korean war and other issues, convinced the Soviet authorities that our foreign policy was truly independent and non-aligned. A token of the changed perception was Stalin's gesture in receiving Dr. Radhakrishnan for a discussion. When Stalin died in March 1953, I met Jawaharlal who agreed in the course of our talk that it would be appropriate for him as Prime Minister to make a reference in Parliament to the late Soviet leader who was a symbol of his country's heroic resistance to Hitler's aggression. Parliament adjourned for the day after Jawaharlal's tribute.

Jawaharlal's kind and friendly attitude to me during these years was in spite of my identifying myself with the Leftist criticism of the Congress and of his Government. I did not realise at the time that if Jawaharlal was a prisoner of conservative forces—a potential Lenin fallen among Kerenskys, as I used to describe him—we of the Left were ourselves substantially to blame. We deserted him instead of strengthening the Congress Left. The Communists, who had alienated themselves from the national mainstream by their People's War policy and opposition to the Quit India struggle, swung to the other extreme and refused for several years to acknowledge that India became politically independent in August 1947.

Even the non-communist Left, unfortunately, chose to be doctrinaire. I remember Jawaharlal telling me that it was not proper for the C.S.P. to have contested the municipal elections in Bombay as a distinct party that could offer a socialist alternative to the Congress. By doing so, the socialists weakened both themselves



and Jawaharlal.

### EXIT OF SOCIALISTS

How greatly we socialists over-rated our influence was to be demonstrated soon. Following the decision to leave the Congress, Narendra Deva and twelve other members resigned from the United Provinces Assembly to which they had been elected in 1946 on the Congress ticket. The socialists could not win any of these seats in the bye-elections that followed.

The exit of the socialists from the Congress led to such developments as the election of Purushottamdas Tandon as Congress president in September 1950, defeating J.B. Kripalani whom Jawaharlal preferred. Another negative consequence of Rightist dominance was the dropping of the Hindu Code Bill from the Congress manifesto for the first general elections of 1951-52. It is a different matter that in his own constituency of Allahabad East, when his principal rival, Prabhudutt Bramachari, offered to withdraw from the contest if the Prime Minister would agree to drop the proposed legislation, Jawaharlal spurned the offer and fought the election on the very issue of improving women's status through codification and reform of Hindu law.

The last great opportunity of forging an alliance of the Left with progressive forces in the Congress was thrown away in 1953 when Jaya Prakash Narayan laid down rigid precondition instead of responding positively to Jawaharlal's invitation to him to join the Government. There was no reason for Jawaharlal making this generous overture except to hasten the country's progress towards socialism, since the Congress party enjoyed a massive majority in the Lok Sabha.

Another example of the broad-mindedness of Jawaharlal and the Congress of those days was their asking me to stand for election as the first Mayor of Delhi. The party position in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi was such that the Jana Sangh would have been able to get its nominee elected unless the Congress and the communist members joined hands. I was at that time no longer a member of the Communist Party which I had joined a few years earlier and was engaged in the constructive work of the Bharat Sevak Samaj. As I was acceptable to both the Congress

and the Communist groups, Jawaharlal and the then Home Minister, Govind Ballabh Pant, asked me to contest the election. This resulted in my election as Mayor.

In the late fifties, Rightist forces within and outside the Congress became vocal in their criticism of the Nehru Government's policies of nationalisation and radical land reforms. Several of us who were known as 'Nehru Socialists' now became convinced of the need to strengthen Jawaharlal's hands if the country was not to slide back to the pre-1947 scenario of landlords and capitalists thriving under foreign patronage. It was in order to explain Jawaharlal's policies and gather support among the intelligentsia that the weekly news magazine *Link* was established in 1958. The founding editor was Edatata Narayanan, whom I had come to know during the Quit India struggle when he gave up his position as assistant editor of *The Hindustan Times*. He joined the underground resistance. *Link* was intended to articulate the need to combine patriotism with the impulse for social justice, and to strengthen the bonds of friendship between India and the socialist world.

### VULNERABLE

Within a couple of years, when the occupation of a considerable extent of Indian territory on the northern border by the forces of Communist China was disclosed, Jawaharlal became vulnerable to criticism. And after the humiliating reverses suffered by India in the hostilities that broke out towards the close of 1962, the attack on Jawaharlal became more vicious.... He wanted the socialists to function, as they used to, as a group within the Congress. When objection was raised by some Congress leaders to dual membership, Jawaharlal asked me to advise the socialists to function as part of the Congress. Gandhiji, too, wanted the socialists to stay with the Congress. I expressed to him my fear that we would be used like a doormat. He was unimpressed by my objection and reiterated his advice. Maulana Azad was of the same view.

Had we socialists heeded this advice when the Congress imposed a ban on dual membership in its new 1948 constitution, we could have strengthened Jawaharlal's hands within the Congress as against the Rightists. With the senior Congress leaders ap-



proaching old age, we socialists could well have acquired decisive influence in the party in a few years. But the C.S.P. decided to leave the parent body, imagining that virulent V.K. Krishna Menon serving as a proxy for those who wanted to see the removal of Jawaharlal from power.

The attack now came from two sides. Gunning for him from the Right were those who wanted India to line up with the West. Citing the Chinese invasion as proof of the failure of Nehru's foreign policy, they hoped that if Nehru could be toppled on the sensitive issue of the military reverses, his domestic policies aimed at land redistribution and public ownership of key industries could also be reversed. On the other side, an influential section in the yet undivided Communist Party attacked Nehru for allowing himself to be dragged into hostilities with a socialist neighbour.

Those of us who saw in steadfast adherence to Nehru's policies the only hope for the survival and strengthening of India as a free nation determined to achieve socialism felt the need for a daily newspaper, published from the Capital, which would counter the tendentious campaign launched against Jawaharlal. The dedicated efforts of Dr A. V. Baliga, the famed surgeon of Bombay who donated his fabulous earnings to humanitarian and public causes, resulted in the launching of *Patriot* within six months of the trauma suffered by the country in the autumn of 1962. It owed not a little to the encouragement and support received from many other friends, including Feroze Gandhi, V.K. Krishna Menon and K.D. Malviya. It was Feroze Gandhi who advised me to make a request to Jawaharlal for the allotment, to the United India Periodicals which had launched *Link* magazine, of the plot of land on which Link House now stands. Without Link House, the launching of *Patriot* would have been impossible. Even with the building and the rental income from it, I have often had occasion to recall the warning sounded by Jawaharlal, when I informed him of Patriot Project, about the formidable financial difficulties of running a daily newspaper. He spoke from his own experience of the *National Herald* which he founded at Luknow in 1938. Moreover, there is a difference between the two. Jawaharlal's *National Herald* was linked to a militant anti-British political movement which the newspaper supported and from which, in turn, it drew support. When *Patriot* was launched we had hoped to strengthen and in

turn to derive strength from a broadbased people's movement to actualise the vision of a free India in which the fruits of development would reach the toiling masses. This expectation has been belied. The cruel hand of death claimed both Dr Baliga and Nehru soon after a year of our launching the newspaper. Subsequently, owing to the fragmentation of progressive forces, the course of economic and social development has increasingly taken an elitist bent. It has widened economic disparities, making a mockery of Jawaharlal's vision.

I try to derive consolation from the adage that it is darkest before a new dawn. It is for the younger generation to relight the torch of Jawaharlal's vision and to correct the course of development. Persons of my generation can but remind today's young people of the India of Gandhiji's and Jawaharlal's dreams. An opportunity to do this came my way when friends connected with the Nehru Memorial Library asked me to write about Jawaharlal's contribution to the reawakening of Indian women. Being no scholar or writer of books, I undertook the task with diffidence. But after I discovered in Shri G.N.S. Raghvan a person who could share the burden and provide the kind of collaboration I needed, the task turned into an intellectually exhilarating discovery of Jawaharlal Nehru—the development of his radiant personality and the maturing of his view of life.

There is a sense in which our discovery of a person becomes complete only after he or she has passed out of our time and entered history. This has been true of my comprehension of Jawaharlal's life and work. My understanding of him is now the richer for the re-reading of his speeches and writings and the reliving.

Jawaharlal himself summed up in few sentences his profoundly humanist vision of development in the course of the first Azad Memorial Lecture which he delivered in 1959 (brought out by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in book form under the title *India Today and Tomorrow*). He said: "Poverty is a degradation, and the obvious reaction is to get rid of it. To talk of freedom in poverty is almost a contradiction in terms. But too much wealth and affluence, whether in an individual or a society, has also its attendant evils which are becoming evident. The mere piling up of material riches may lead to an emptiness in the inner life of man.



There is a danger that socialism, while leading to affluence and even equitable distribution, may still miss some of the significant features of life. It is largely for this reason that stress becomes necessary on the individual".

---

*National Herald*, special supplement.

### 3. Kamala Nehru: Brave Pioneer

---

JAWAHARLAL'S participation in the nation's politics began in the very year of his marriage with Kamala. The formation of the Home Rule League in 1916 was followed by martial law in the Punjab and the non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhiji. Kamala was strongly attracted by the Mahatma's precept and personal example of simple living and dedicated public work. She was a source of encouragement to Jawaharlal in abandoning the affluent life-style to which he had been accustomed, and taking to the hard path of Gandhian *satyagraha*. This was not liked by her mother-in-law and some other relatives. Indira Gandhi recalls in an interview (November 1972), that her mother was "a very intense person, and whenever she took up anything she felt very strongly about it. Firstly, when my father came into the political field, there was a certain amount of opposition from the family. They did not want him to go to that extent, to submerge himself, and I think that was the time when my mother's influence counted and she supported him fully..." Swarup Rani (Kamala's mother-in-law) "felt that my mother need not have encouraged my father in some of his ideas.... Even when people were against what my father was doing and saying, they did not blame it on him, but it was taken out on her in a way.... In our household a lot of people carried tales. She was unhappy.... I loved her deeply and when I thought that she was being wronged I fought for her and quarrelled with people.... I saw her being hurt and I was determined not to be hurt."

Indira Gandhi also spoke of her mother's lack of interest in jewellery, the acquisition of more and more of which is a ruling passion with most women of the middle and upper classes. "She dis-



liked jewellery ever since I can remember. Whether it was because of the influence of Gandhiji or her own I do not know. But she felt jewellery was almost a symbol of slavery and that women were made to wear all this so that they could not function as human beings—something like what the Women's Lib say, that they are objects of decoration."

Krishna Hutheesing recalls with grateful appreciation her sister-in-law's helpful role at the time of her marriage: "Though she was far from well that autumn of 1933, Kamala took enormous pains with my trousseau, and saw to all the details of the wedding. The one thing that upset her was that our family had very little money left. Nearly all her jewellery, and mother's too, had been sold; there was not much left for me. But still she gave me part of what little jewellery she still had; and mother gave me a little of hers. It was Kamala more than anyone else who made my wedding a gay and happy occasion."

Jawaharlal's total involvement in public life from the time of the non-cooperation movement in 1920 ruled out the possibility of his attending personally to the improvement of Kamala's education. A tutor was engaged. In a letter to his father from Lucknow District Jail on 1 September 1922, Jawaharlal says: "Kamala wanted to know what to pay Chaterji who comes to coach her and Beti. I think Rs. 45/- a month should be paid to him. He used to get Rs. 25/- when he came for an hour or more for Beti. Now he comes for two hours and takes two pupils." Later in the same month he informs his father that Kamala wished to appear at some examinations of the Prayag Mahila Vidyapith, an institution which sought to promote women's education in northern and central India: "She wants to ask your permission but apparently she has not been able to muster enough courage for the purpose. I see no harm in her appearing. In fact I think they will do her good. She will give you particulars."

But life at Anand Bhawan was too unsettled—with Motilal Nehru and, more frequently, Jawaharlal leaving Allahabad on political tours, or being in jail—for these educational arrangements to work out satisfactorily. Kamala Nehru's case illustrates the unavoidable sacrifice of some part of the obligations owed to members of one's immediate family when a person dedicates himself or herself to a larger public cause. Both Motilal Nehru and

Jawaharlal recognised, and neither was happy about this conflict of duties.

The elder Nehru, who gave up his legal practice and the princely income therefrom during the non-cooperation movement, asks his son in a letter (16 September 1920): "Have you had any time to attend to the poor cows in Anand Bhawan? Not that they are really cows but have been reduced to the position of cows by nothing short of culpable negligence on your part and mine—I mean your mother, your wife, your child and your sisters? I do not know with what grace and reason we can claim to be working for the good of the masses—the country at large—when we fail egregiously to minister to the most urgent requirements of our own flesh and blood and those whose flesh and blood we are."

With the maturing of his perception of human worth in terms of character rather than education or other attainments, Jawaharlal became sharply self-critical of his former tendency to take his wife for granted. About the early years of their marriage, he recalls in the *Autobiography* (in the main body of the work written in 1934-35 when Kamala was still living): "So great became my concentration in these (public) activities that, all unconsciously, I almost overlooked her and left her to her own resources, just when she required my full cooperation. My affection for her continued and even grew, and it was a great comfort to know that she was there to help me with her soothing influence. She gave me strength, but she must have suffered and felt a little neglected. An unkindness to her would almost have been better than this semi-forgetful, casual attitude". This is the dilemma of those for whom public work becomes an obsession. I faced it from 1942 onwards. Placing public causes above human relationships and duties, I kept travelling round the country even after my emergence from underground life early in 1946. I would explain my absences jocularly to my husband by remarking—after the title of one of Lenin's works—"You are the State, I am the Revolution." But after Asaf's passing away came punishment in the form of pangs of regret and self-reproach at my neglect of him.

Feeling inadequate and unhappy about her lack of education, Kamala tried to improve her English and to learn Urdu, Sanskrit and French, both in India and while in Europe during 1926-27 for medical treatment. She accompanied Jawaharlal on his first visit



to the Soviet Union in 1927, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. The impact made on them by what they saw in the new Russia is described by Jawaharlal in the course of a letter from Moscow (10 November 1927) to his sister Vijaya Lakshmi: "To give an account of our impressions and experiences even within the 36 hours or so we have been here would take a long slice off a day and many sheets of notepaper.... All one's old values get upset and life wears a strange aspect here. Everybody is *tovarish* (comrade).... One cannot move or turn in any direction without gazing at Lenin—a statue or picture or photo or painting. Every house and almost every shop window has it. He is the God of the Russians today and a mere mention of his name makes them light up. The shops, though often containing beautiful Russian-made goods, are poor in comparison with shops elsewhere.... Finery is not encouraged. The effect of a few hours of Moscow on Kamala was that she wanted to take off the border from a simple sari she was wearing as she felt she was over-dressed." As one who had a special interest in the status and role of women, Kamala was much impressed by the freer position of women in the Soviet Union and by the care lavished by the State on the health and education of children. She also reacted strongly against the racial snobbery and colour consciousness she noticed in England, in contrast to what she had observed in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe.

Kamala desired not only to overcome her own educational handicap but also to save other young women from it. Her feelings are expressed poignantly in numerous letters (in Hindi and Urdu) to Syed Mahmud, a close friend of the Nehru family and specially of Jawaharlal. She wrote the letters during 1926-27 from Europe where she was being treated at different sanatoria.

Though Syed Mahmud had qualified for the bar in England and obtained a Ph.D. in Germany, the women in his home observed *purdah* and his daughters were not being sent to school. In a letter of 1 April, 1926 from Montana, Kamala says: "You have not written to me whether your daughters have been put to school. I am impatient to hear the good news. The time has come when women too should work for their country. Only men would not do. Please give up *purdah*. It has ruined the women and brutalised the men. If you regard Jawahar as your brother and me as your sister, we ex-

pect you to disown *purdah*." In a subsequent letter of 4 November 1926 from Geneva, she again pleads with Doctor Sahib to "arrange to teach English to your daughters, without which they cannot move ahead in this world. And while remaining in *purdah* they cannot learn anything. Send them to the girls' school at Allahabad, where some Muslim girls are already enrolled. Today only the educated are honoured. People do not want to talk to those who are uneducated, so much so that close relations and even the husbands do not wish to talk to them.... Therefore take pity on them and make them self-reliant." Returning to the subject in yet another letter (15 March 1927): "If you love Jawahar, you have to do both these things: abolish *purdah* and arrange to educate your daughters. Please show this letter to sister (Syed Mahmud's wife) also. Unless you give me the good news that your daughters' education has been arranged, I will not write to you about my health."

On Syed Mahmud attempting to defend the institution of *purdah*, she replies spiritedly (4 May, 1927): "I am not convinced about the virtues of *purdah* that you have suggested.... I want you men to be put in *purdah* for some years, and then I should ask you what it is like. Then your answer will be different. Women are intellectually superior to men and given some education they will show it." These letters of Kamala Nehru demonstrate the growth of consciousness among Indian women, even those who did not receive modern education through English, as early as in the twenties of this century. The ideas and sentiments so boldly affirmed by her should be a source of inspiration for young people now active in the women's movement, many of whom have tended to turn to Western feminist literature rather than the example set by our own pioneers of social restructuring like Kamala Nehru.

---

*Private Face of A Public Person*  
Radiant Publishers, New Delhi.



## 4. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Patriot, Scholar, Statesman

PERSONS of my generation feel increasingly bereft as with inexorable regularity those who have been our props disappear. Our inner stability gets shaken; every thing grows strangely unfamiliar and a sense of emptiness becomes overpowering.

Every time someone near us reaches the end of life's journey, a small part of us withers away. Somewhere within us we register the death of a part of ourselves. This is so when men like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad cease to be. The shock of his sudden end is so immediate that I wonder if I shall be able to say all that I want to, coherently and with objectivity.

Were he to me just one of a galaxy of leaders, whom the rank and file in a political organization revere as sublimations of their smaller selves I would not have dared to pen these thoughts. I, however, knew him not only as one of the giants who led the freedom struggle but also as one privileged to come near him because of his strong attachment to my husband. In his scale of personal relationships a friend held a very high place. In some cases his friends enjoyed privileges denied even to members of his own family, and their number was severely restricted. Although I do not remember him defining precisely the meaning of friendship, I believe I am not misinterpreting him if I say that he was attracted to minds that generally responded as rationalists to the intellectual and social challenge of our age.

Maulana Saheb's associations with my husband began, I believe, when he came to Delhi in 1923 to preside over the special session of the Indian National Congress. But the bond that held them together had many strands. They shared a similarity of po-

litical beliefs, an impassioned attachment to the best in the cultural traditions of the Mughal age, both literary and social, and finally a firm conviction that Western liberal values were perfectly compatible with the essence of Islamic teachings. This perhaps was why Maulana Saheb chose to accept Asaf Saheb as a friend and also his hospitality during his frequent visits to Delhi, right up to the day he joined the Central Cabinet. He felt at home with us, not because we could offer him the amenities of a prosperous home. What drew him perhaps was the opportunity for being with someone to whom he could turn for intellectually stimulating talk, his only relaxation, and which he obviously prized more than physical comforts.

An incident that comes to my mind symbolizes an attitude that was typical of him.

Often during the fateful and eventful years of 1930 to 1941 the Congress Working Committee would be compelled to hold its meetings in the months of May and June. Maulana Saheb was sensitive to the fierce heat of Delhi. He suffered more than others, and anxious to spare him the discomforts inevitable in the stifling atmosphere of our home in Kucha Chelan, on one occasion I suggested to my husband that Maulana Saheb should be persuaded to stay at the Birla House where some of his other colleagues generally stayed. Asaf Saheb was not quite sure if it was proper on our part to suggest this; but nevertheless agreed. Birla House was also informed that Maulana Saheb would be staying there.

On my part I was sure that the Maulana would welcome the suggestion as the unbearable heat would have affected his health, particularly as we were not in a position to lessen its severity for obvious reasons. But I was wrong. Maulana Saheb brushed aside the suggestion in his own characteristic way. When he arrived he entered our car and much to my embarrassment, asked to be driven to Kucha Chelan! We were obviously overwhelmed, but I think I am not exaggerating if I say that the meaning of personal values acquired a new significance for me that day.

Much has been said and written and more will undoubtedly follow about Abul Kalam Azad the patriot, scholar and statesman. But I wonder if anyone from amongst his friends and colleagues will be able to write about him as a householder. Some family biographer alone can enlighten us on his childhood, early youth and



young manhood, because he was extraordinarily reserved about himself and more so about his family. Very few knew what he meant to his own people. But having come to know some of them of late I have learnt that he was an affectionate and considerate guardian to all those who depended on him. Only he broke their heart when he refused to accept parole during his detention in Ahmednagar Fort when his wife lay dying.

Judged by his personal habits Maulana Azad had a fairly strict code of domestic discipline. His was never the ascetic's approach to the things that make life livable. But equally would he frown upon extravagance and ostentation. In the early days of our acquaintance I mistook his protest at the elaborateness of our menus as a courteous formality. Then I noticed that having failed to persuade me to give up wastefulness, as far as he was concerned he began restricting his meal to two courses only, ignoring the rest!

Again as a rule in our Indian way of life we are somewhat unaware of the virtues of punctuality. But when Maulana Sahab asked for his tea at 4.30 in the morning and lunch at 11, he did not mean that it could be 4.35 or 11.15. Once I remember, something went wrong somewhere and lunch was served half an hour later than usual, and Maulana Sahab went without his meal. That was naturally the very last time such a lapse was permitted. At first it appeared to me that punctuality was perhaps an end in itself with him, a merely meticulous way. But soon after I knew why he insisted on keeping to his time-table with such strictness. His early hours were precious to him as he spent them in serious reading and writing. And so, he wanted the rest of his day planned in such a way as to make it possible for him to rise refreshed every morning.

A political leader of his eminence has to handle men from all walks of life. Maulana Sahab had to suffer fools as well as cross swords with men of great stature. But he would relax only in the company of those who were more or less conversant with the rich treasures of Urdu and Persian literature, medieval and modern history and theology. It was never very easy therefore to help him to relax. More often than not it was a matter of his host and he sitting and talking for hours together. He naturally wanted an audience of minds capable of taking in what he had to say and if on

rare occasions we were able to invite a few such, Maulana Sahab's conversational brilliance, according to Asaf Sahab would surpass his oratorical skill. As for myself, all I could understand as a very bewildered and ignorant observer from the wings was that for every quotation presented by others he recalled several more to the delight and admiration of those who had assembled.

I was lucky in discovering that he liked taking long drives particularly to the historical sites around Delhi. Besides the known monuments, we would wander amidst the ruins surrounding them and he would recount legends that had grown around a particular bridge, mosque or house and his companions would marvel at his memory, his capacity for detailed observation. Once he expressed a desire to see Suraj Kund near Tughlakabad, and we set forth in search of it before sunrise. We lost our way, but a shepherd boy led us to the spot. He recited a Persian couplet which when translated meant—Knowledge was not the prerogative of the lettered.

Behind that austere expression lay an endless capacity for absorbing natural beauty and human comprehension. How often have those who worked with him and known him closely heard him laugh? I wonder if Jawaharlalji remembers an occasion, sometime in the late 'thirties, I think, when he was interrupted at a public meeting held in the Gandhi Ground by some communalist demonstrators. As is usual with him he lost his temper and rebuked them and thundered that they shut up. He came to see Maulana Sahab immediately after the meeting and with boyish candour confessed: "Maulana, I have described myself as a *shandar admi* today". He at once retorted: "You have done very well, indeed!" and all three of them, Maulana Sahab, Jawaharlalji and Asaf Sahab roared with laughter. Translation robs the peculiar charm of what was said by the one to the other on that occasion.

Soon after 1939, such occasional patches, free of the tension of insistent public affairs came to an end. After the Ramgarh session of the Congress, the prisons put in their usual claim. Then a brief spell of freedom and then came in 1942, sweeping as it were, all that was before it off the face of India. Some of the old links were broken irreparably but that was the price we paid for freedom.

When I first met him in Calcutta after his release from Ahmednagar I was still legally not free to do so. I expected to be rebuked



as we had been told that our work in the 1942 upheaval had not met with the approval of some of the leaders. Instead, he expressed himself in terms which dispelled our fears. But he advised caution and a return to normal conditions.

At the risk of being personal I cannot help recalling the great understanding he gave me in the hour of my personal grief even though politically I had drifted away from the Congress. One day he related a story he said he had read somewhere and he wanted me to listen carefully. A poor peasant had an only son. He had worked very hard to enable his son to complete his schooling. After the boy's success in his examination he was sent to a neighbouring city so that he could start life as an office clerk, his life's ambition. One evening he received a telegram and thought that it must be from his son giving him glad tidings of his success in securing work. But the peasant was illiterate and could not read. So, he hurried to the village school teacher eager to have the telegram read. The teacher shook his head, looked into his eyes and told him that his son was dead, that he was killed in a road accident. The peasant's heart stood still and he wept unendingly. After a while he calmed down and left the school teacher's cottage. A little later the teacher thought he heard someone ploughing the fields. He wondered who could have started working his field at that time of night. He went out with his lantern to see who it could be and he found the stricken peasant busy ploughing. Maulana Sahab said: "You see, he found the remedy for his pain, work".

Tolerance to him did not merely mean religious tolerance. He believed in the absolute right of an individual to differ and hold what opinions he believed to be correct. But he emphasized the need for beliefs. So long as the ends were good and consistent with a rational code of ethics and people who pursued them were also prepared to suffer for them he tried to understand them, even though he did not necessarily agree with them. Once the Maulana sensed insincerity and sycophancy in any individual he turned away from him and no special pleading could make him alter his opinion. He was intolerant of cant and all that goes with it.

These fragments from a past have flitted back into my consciousness after a decade and a half. But partial amnesia has claimed much that should have remained vivid. In attempting to record them today I have in a very inadequate way only attempted

to sketch for our mourning people Maulana Azad's bright and human personality.

*From Stout Hearts and Open Minds.*



on moderation and contentment, and unostentatious service of mankind, which means those within your humble reach. Attempting too much is to invite disappointment, like expecting too much from life. And, above all, remember that individuals are very insignificant beings in the sea of humanity, and mankind as a whole is an equally infinitesimal entity in this limitless Universe. Humility of the spirit is the sheet-anchor of contentment. Self-respect is a precious privilege, but it must never be confused with pride or the wrong sort of vanity."

It was but a meagre collection of my husband's letters and diaries that I could retrieve and make available to the writer of this biography, Sudhir Pant. Apart from my not being exempt from the national trait of indifference to the chronicling of historical events, which Asaf used to comment on, I was so immersed in my political and trade union activities (which included four years of unsettled underground life) that I could not systematically pre-serve or record his or my correspondence and conversations with the makers of history with whom we were thrown together. Sudhir Pant has drawn skilfully both on the sparse personal papers and the official records of the three decades prior to independence, which mirror the events of the period as perceived by the British, to reconstruct and narrate the story of Asaf Saheb's life against the background of the political events of the time. I am thankful to G N S Raghavan for going through the manuscript carefully and editing it, and amplifying the narrative at some places in consultation with me. I would also like to acknowledge with thanks the help received from the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and my husband's surviving colleagues who shared their memories of working with a valued senior.

I trust that the book will not only be of nostalgic interest to freedom fighters of my generation but will appeal also to the younger generation. I have in mind specially those who were born or grew up after the independence for which Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Asaf Ali and others strove. They entertained a vision of free India, united on the basis of social and economic justice, which it is for the post-independence generation to turn into reality.

Foreword to a biography of Asaf Ali, by Sudhir Pant, published by the National Book Trust in 1984.

## 5. Asaf Ali: Patriot and Humanist

WRITING the foreword to a biography of one's spouse is perhaps unusual. Though reluctant initially, I agreed to do so if only because of the opportunity it gives me of placing on record my grateful thanks to Krishna Kripalani, Chairman of the National Book Trust, whose encouragement has made possible the publication of this first account of the life and work of my husband.

A many-sided personality—scholar, lawyer, nationalist, writer and connoisseur of music and the arts—he was a remarkable product of the encounter between, and synthesis of, Hindu and Islamic cultures, and of Indian and Western values. He continued his literary and, to a limited extent, his legal pursuits even within jail as a political prisoner. In a letter from an internment camp where he revised his translation of Aeschylus's 'Perse', Asaf acknowledged the uses of being marooned, but complains: "My trouble is lack of material. The Introduction to 'The Persians' alone demands a whole library. In spite of my life-long study of the connected period, I feel helpless at times trying to recall the correct names in their original, un-Greeked Iranian (Dari) form."<sup>\*</sup>

Though an ardent nationalist, he was completely free of chauvinism. Like Rabindranath Tagore whom he so greatly admired, Asaf was a humanist first and foremost: "From the egoistic individual to the family, communal, racial and national Ego, each and all follow the same course—each imagining himself or themselves the only chosen people who must be infallibly right". To one with such perception, humility came naturally: "Build your happiness

<sup>\*</sup> The quotations are from letters which he wrote to my brother, Prabhat Ganguli, from Ahmednagar Fort in the early part of 1943.



## 6. Acharya Narendra Dev: A Tribute

It was my misfortune that I first met this luminous savant, teacher and leader of the Congress Socialist Party only as late as in 1946 and that my acquaintance with him lasted only for a few years.

Looking back, I cannot help rueing the fact that the then circumstances prevented me from acquiring his friendship and guidance. He might have helped me to gain greater clarity of political thought.

Under the spell of the Gandhi-Nehru leadership of the Congress from the 1930s, I was among the radical elements in the Congress attracted by the ideal of socialism, but I was not formally a member of the Congress Socialist Party.

My sister, Purnima Banerjee, who lived and worked in Allahabad, was a close colleague of the leaders of the CSP, in particular of Ram Manohar Lohia and Achyut Patwardhan. Whenever we met, we exchanged notes and shared our experiences, in our respective spheres. Delhi and Allahabad were somewhat different in terms of political environment. Though Delhi was the capital and the principal centre of the struggle against the British rulers in the legislative arena, Allahabad was the heart of the Congress party not only because it was the home of Pandit Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru, but the AICC office functioned from that city. Purnima was very close to the Nehru family and specially to Kamla Nehru. I came to learn about the familiar relationships in this unique family and their devotion to Gandhiji and close relationship with many leading lights of the national movement. Among them was Acharya Narendra Dev.

The ties of affection which bound Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress socialist leaders will be evident from the following extract from a letter which Jayaprakash Narayan wrote on 7th December 1941 from the Deoli detention camp to Jawaharlalji: "I cannot but feel extremely happy at your being out when the country needs your guidance most. You must have learnt about Narendra Deva's health. One of his greatest failings is that he cannot take care of himself. What we call *sankotch* (delicate moral scruple) will prevent him from asking any of his innumerable friends to do anything for him. I am, therefore, writing to you to take a particular interest in this matter and to pack him off to some suitable place. You must not leave this thing to his option. In this matter you must treat him as one treats a child. You may consult Bapu (Gandhiji) also in this connection as he has been taking a keen interest in Narendra Deva's health."

Some eyebrows had been raised when Acharya Narendra Dev also with J.P. and Achyut Patwardhan were included in the Congress Working Committee by Jawaharlal Nehru soon after the historic Lucknow session of the Congress in 1936. Jawaharlalji, who had in his presidential address stressed the need for socialism in order to solve the country's problems, wanted to include representatives of the Left-wing of the Congress in the highest decision-making body. He believed that they could influence Congressmen and women with their socialist outlook and help in drawing the masses into the struggle for freedom.

Congress workers at the lower levels of the organisation, like myself, heard that the conservatives among Nehru's colleagues were somewhat perturbed by this development. They felt that it might undermine the organisational structure of the Congress and lead to disunity on ideological grounds.

However, Gandhiji applied the healing touch, as usual, and pacified them all. He urged Jawaharlal Nehru to keep in mind the imperative need for unity. And whatever the CSP leaders' ideological reservations about the general line of thinking in the Congress, Acharyaji was too ardent a patriot to encourage any dissidence on the part of his socialist colleagues.

Such was Jawaharlal Nehru's confidence in Narendra Devji that when the *National Herald* was being planned, he asked him to help in selecting the staff and wanted him to make sure that too



many individuals known for their conservative views were not appointed.

M. Chalapathi Rau, the veteran journalist and distinguished editor of the *National Herald* wrote that "Acharyaji was somewhat of a legend and was known for his eloquence in more than one language. Fluency could be fatal to thinking, and it came as a surprise to me, while editing some of his wartime (World War II) contributions to the *National Herald*, that clarity of thought and expression could go with such power of eloquence. He was effective in demolishing the case of those who sought to make the war appear first as an imperialist war and then as a people's war. His understanding of events in Europe was as complete as Nehru's and his commentary on the national revolution, though critical, was re-deemed by comprehensiveness. He was to me one of the few thinkers in the Congress. His thoroughly modern outlook was wrapped up in old-world courtesy and charm. His humility was genuine and not a mask. I was told that a review by me of *Socialism and the National Revolution*—a compilation of his writings and speeches by Yusuf Meherally—struck him as too generous an assessment which he did not deserve".

In 1942, when the hostilities were at their height, the 'Quit India' struggle united all those Congress socialists as well as other Congressmen who felt that alien regime must be fought from outside prison walls, for as long as possible. Therefore, when, after 1947, Congress leaders such as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Acharya Kripalani declared that the CSP should either disband itself or quit the Congress, I was in a dilemma. As was usual with me, I sought the advice of Gandhiji, Jawaharlalji and Maulana Azad. All of them asked me to request Acharya Narendra Dev to persuade Ashoka Mehta, Ram Manohar Lohia, etc. to cease to function as a party, but to work within the Congress as a group.

I was asked to approach Acharyaji and I did so. A sufferer from chronic asthma, he looked very frail. But he was resolute in saying he could not agree to the proposal. Later, when the socialists left the Congress, such was his adherence to principled politics that he resigned from the United Provinces legislature along with his socialist colleagues who had won the elections on the Congress ticket. It is a different matter that, as Socialist Party candidates, they lost in the by-elections which were held to fill the vacancies.

A great admirer of the Chinese revolution of 1949 under Mao Tse-Tung's leadership, Narendra Devji, along with Nehru, campaigned for the recognition of New China, in spite of opposition from the anti-Communists among his Socialist Party colleagues.

As a member of the first official goodwill mission to China, he spent six weeks in that country studying the approach of the new regime to problems of economic and social transformation. He refused to be brow-beaten by the non-progressive members of the delegation. Acharyaji died early in 1956, when Sino-Indian relations had not yet soured.

M. Chalapathi Rau was a close friend of his alter ego, Edatata Narayanan, who founded the *LINK* news magazine in 1958, and *PATRIOT*, the daily, in 1963 to campaign for support to Nehru's foreign and domestic policies in the most crucial period of India's post-independence history. When the Chinese struck, the reactionary forces shrieked that Communist China had betrayed Nehru's trust and friendship and that he should dismiss Krishna Menon, the Defence Minister, whom they regarded as a crypto-Communist. Both Chalapathi Rau and Narayanan were firm supporters of Nehru and did their best through their newspapers to counter the virulent campaign against Nehru and Nehruvians in the columns of what was called the Jute Press in India.

Had Acharyaji relented on the controversial issue whether the Socialists should work as a group within the Congress, I believe that he would have strengthened Jawaharlal Nehru's hands and thereby contributed to the early fulfilment of the basic needs of our masses and the achievement of self-reliant growth by our country. It was equally distressing that because of narrow considerations of party and individual interests, some of Nehru's colleagues prevented the two noble leaders, so near to one another in their values, from working together. In the preface to *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru acknowledges in these words his indebtedness to Acharyaji and other fellow-prisoners in the Ahmednagar Fort prison where the book was written: "Prison is not a pleasant place to live in even for a short period, much less for long years. But it was a privilege for me to live in close contact with men of outstanding ability and culture and a wide human outlook.... Though I am grateful to all my companions, I should like to



mention especially Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Govind Ballabh Pant, Narendra Deva and M. Asaf Ali".

When Gandhiji first met Narendra Deva in 1929, he saw in him a jewel of a son of India. And in 1947 Gandhiji wanted him to take up the presidentship of a reorganised post-independence Congress so as to serve the masses at the grass-roots level. Had Gandhiji not been snatched away in 1948, the story of India's march, her long march to make the peasant and worker create their own heaven on earth, might have been quite different from what it is today.

On his death in 1956 after a long period of illness, Jawaharlal Nehru said, "His health failed him. Otherwise he was a man of rare distinction—distinction in many fields—rare in spirit, rare in mind and intellect, and rare in integrity".

## 7. Rameshwari Nehru: Gentle Crusader

RAMESHWARI NEHRU was a woman who, along with many a celebrated contemporary of her family, contributed greatly to the awakening of men and women of the intelligentsia, from the early decades of this century right up to her death in 1966.

Reading some of her letters to her husband's cousin, Jawaharlal Nehru, in 1906 when he was at Harrow, I was much surprised to know that, despite her social background as daughter of Raja Narendranth of Lahore, and her early marriage to Brijlal Nehru, a senior civil servant, she was thinking of India's political subjection and urging her brother-in-law to serve the country on his return.

My amazement was natural. At that point of time the affluent classes were reluctant to identify themselves with the emerging nationalist and revolutionary movements in India. And Rameshwari belonged to the aristocratic layers of Indian society. What is more, she was married to a person who was serving in the higher bureaucracy established by the British as the steel frame of their rule. As such, she was not expected to express views which could be interpreted as being hostile to the British. Except in Bengal where Curzon's politically mischievous partition of the province had outraged the sentiments of the public, high and low alike, the Indian elite at the beginning of the 20th century could not think of openly ranging themselves against the British power and the system established by it. Yet Rameshwari Nehru, barely twenty at that time, had the courage to express her patriotic feelings.

She was acquainted with my husband, through Motilal Nehru, uncle of Brijlal Nehru. The renowned lawyer of Allahabad was in-



variably the guest of Brijlal and Rameshwari Nehru at their house on Clive Road whenever he came to Delhi. Asaf Saheb knew and looked up to Motilalji as a distinguished senior both in public life and in the profession of law.

My husband and I were invited by the Nehrus one evening, soon after my marriage in September 1928, to meet Motilalji who had come on a visit along with Jawaharlal. I felt lost in what struck me as a sombre gathering of elderly persons talking about problems of the day of which I was utterly ignorant. Till my marriage at the age of nineteen I had been a total stranger to politics. I can never forget how embarrassed and distressed I felt at that evening's informal dinner party. The conversation centred round the seething communal tensions in the country, specially since the assassination of Swami Shraddhanand, the Arya Samaj leader, by a fanatical Muslim.

Rameshwari Nehru must have realised, with womanly intuition, how acutely uncomfortable I felt, a newcomer who felt inadequate among persons senior by twenty years and more. Otherwise why should she have come over to me, leaving the select circle surrounding the regal Motilal Nehru and discussing momentous matters? Having sensed that I was ill at ease in that serious gathering, and she started asking me about my family and my special interests, and expressed motherly concern about things that are important to a young woman at the very threshold of life. When she thus showed affectionate interest in me, I just rushed into her embracing arms, as it were. I remember how deeply impressed I was by her striking personality, the large and beautiful eyes imbued with sympathy and understanding.

As I came closer to Rameshwariji in the weeks and months that followed, she saw that I was a frightened young thing bewildered by the sharp change in environment from a missionary college in Nainital to life in a Muslim home in the walled city. Rameshwariji and her husband knew of course that Asaf Saheb, a contemporary of Brijlal Nehru during their studies in England, was a Muslim—as they themselves were Hindus—only by the accident of birth, and belonged with them by education and temperament to a small circle of enlightened and liberal Indians.

Realising that I wanted to occupy myself with something in addition to and more significant than domestic chores, Ramesh-

wariji suggested to me that I might join and work for the Delhi Women's League, which she had founded that very year as the local branch of the All India Women's Conference. I was thrilled at the opportunity to work for a cause. This was my first apprenticeship in organisational work, and I gratefully recall the guidance and training which I received from Rameshwariji. She taught me how to organise meetings, prepare minutes of discussions, keep records, and follow up the implementation of decisions. Eventually this training and encouragement led to my being elected as the Secretary of the Delhi Women's League. This assignment gave me an insight into the problems faced by the women of India and the need to organise women for their active involvement in movements for social change. It was not enough, I realised, to ask for equality; we had to deserve it and struggle for it.

If my getting to know Asaf Saheb had opened my mind to a world wider than of the limited home of my childhood and my cloistered education, Rameshwariji helped me to enter a wider field of activity. The two were thus my guides in the early years of my life in Delhi. Then came in 1930 the tidal wave of Gandhiji's Salt Satyagraha which carried me into the heart of the struggle for independence.

During 1934-35 Rameshwariji threw herself, as a devoted follower of Gandhiji, into the campaign for eradicating the evil of untouchability from our society. She toured the country extensively in this connection, bringing to the cause of Harijan liberation the same zeal she had shown for women's emancipation. I continued to meet her frequently and seek her guidance, responding to her motherly affection with gratitude and devotion. Rameshwariji was completely free of the snobbery and arrogance of the well-to-do. This was what attracted so many of us to her.

Later, at the height of the freedom struggle and after independence, I was drawn into the Left movement, and was delighted when I found Rameshwariji associating herself with the All India Peace Council and subsequently the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation. This came as a considerable surprise because, in the fifties, the peace movement was labelled by conservatives and rightists as Communist-controlled. The fact was that Rameshwariji was attracted to the peace movement because of her Gandhian values, just as these values had led her to espouse the



cause of women and of Harijans. She was undeterred by the anti-Communist witch-hunt of that period, and by her own leadership proved the broad character of the peace movement.

I have referred to my initiation into the women's movement in the late twenties. A quarter century later, when some of us felt the need to widen the base and the objectives of the movement beyond its moorings in the English-educated upper classes and their narrow concerns, Rameshwariji blessed the formation in 1954 of the National Federation of Indian Women which wanted the movement to embrace also women of the peasantry, working class and others in the middle and lower rungs of society.

When Dr. A. V. Baliga, along with my colleagues and myself founded the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society in 1952, Rameshwariji associated herself enthusiastically with its work. Later, as founder president of the Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity, she formed a National Campaign Committee for the liberation of Portuguese-occupied territories on Indian soil. I was privileged to be chosen as chairman of this Committee, in whose work Goan patriots were actively involved. During the years that Rameshwariji headed the solidarity movement, freedom fighters of Algeria, Vietnam, Palestine and South Africa began to be invited to India and the Association helped to mobilise moral and material support for these liberation movements.

'Mataji', as she was affectionately called by then, was the personification of humanism, sincerity, simplicity and dignity. These qualities were instantly recognised by those who worked with and came to know her. The reverence with which she was treated by the delegates to the Peace Congress at Stockholm was remarkable. With untiring zeal Rameshwariji travelled to many countries in the fifties to popularise the Stockholm Peace Appeal.

History is sometimes capricious and unfair in the manner in which it awards recognition to individuals who make history. Those of us who knew and worked with Rameshwari Nehru feel sad that her work is virtually unknown to the present generation. The role she played in the movement for women's emancipation and world peace ought to be known much more widely than it is. Rameshwariji was an early exemplar of the triple cause of peace, equality and development which is now inscribed on the banner of the international women's movement. She was the embodiment of

Indian womanhood at its best, a rare being who never sought any position of power or prestige and who preferred to be true to her beliefs unmindful of critics and criticism. Awareness of her life and work should be an inspiration and spur to young people of today, particularly women.

I am, therefore, very glad that the National Book Trust has sponsored a biography of Rameshwari Nehru this year, on the occasion of her birth centenary. Shri O.P. Paliwal is a happy choice for writing the biography. He had the opportunity of working closely with Rameshwariji for several years, in his capacity as Secretary of the Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity and subsequently as Deputy Secretary-General of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (headquarters at Cairo). He was the first Indian to be chosen for that high office from 1974 to 1978.

For him this has been a labour of love, an opportunity to offer his tribute to one who inspired so many men and women of at least two generations starting with mine. We should be thankful to him for sparing no effort to unearth information from various sources to light up and bring out the significance of Rameshwari Nehru's dedicated life.

New Delhi

May 1, 1986.

—Aruna Asaf Ali

Introduction to the biography of Rameshwari Nehru, by Om Prakash Paliwal, published by the National Book Trust in 1986.



## 8. Satyavati Devi: Role of Delhi Women in Freedom Struggle

THE history of India's struggle for freedom goes back, in my view, to the late 18th century when the full implications of our political subservience to British rule dawned in the minds of our forefathers. It gathered momentum thereafter with every passing decade.

Women in India those days, as elsewhere in the world, were confined to their homes and excluded from participating in social or political affairs. This was specially so as far as the middle and upper classes were concerned. Even women who worked as farm-hands were denied by and large their right to function in village Panchayats and other organisations concerned with problems which affected the community. They were as a rule paid lesser wages than men, besides being discriminated against in social and political life.

The movement for social reforms in the 19th century and later were led by men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Maharashi Karve and many others in different parts of the country. These great social reformers played a crucial role in focussing attention on the social disabilities of women and the difficult conditions under which they lived. They realised that if women are deprived of opportunities to function as equal participants in all activities that affected the well-being of the community, a country would never be able to rise to the heights of modern enlightenment or achieve freedom and progress.

The Indian National Congress turned to Mahatma Gandhi for leadership from 1920 onwards. He made the struggle for Swaraj a

mass movement and called upon women to come forward and join the ranks of *Satyagrahis*. They did so in large numbers over the period from 1930 to 1942, during the several movements of 1930, 1932, 1940 and 1942.

Men had been reluctant to permit women to participate in activities outside their homes. However, Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement galvanised the masses, not only men but also women, who succeeded in persuading their menfolk to let them take part in the national struggle. Being the capital of India, Delhi had become in 1911 an administrative unit directly ruled by the Central Government, therefore it attracted Indians from all parts of the country. But in spite of its metropolitan character, the social milieu till the close of the 1920s was very conservative and dominated by the middle and upper classes. From 1930, however, Delhi became the main centre of Congress deliberations and activities. As a result there was an unprecedented awakening among the women of Delhi. From the 1930s to the very end of British rule in our country, Delhi women joined the struggle in very large numbers. Housewives from urban and rural areas organised themselves for carrying out the Congress programmes of non-violent civil disobedience campaigns. Chandni Chowk and its *mohallas* in the walled city with its lanes and bylanes were the storm centres.

Smt. Satyavati Devi, grand daughter of Swami Shraddhanand, was the foremost woman leader of Delhi of those years. Her fiery oratory and remarkable capacity for organisation drew women in their hundreds to join the *Satyagraha* campaigns. It was Delhi's good fortune that this fearless and courageous woman leader emerged to lead the struggle. Satyavati electrified the atmosphere with her eloquent speeches. Within a few weeks she set up the Congress Mahila Samaj and the Congress Desh Sevika Dal. Women from all walks of life and all corners of Delhi were attracted by Satyavati's sincerity and her passionate patriotism. Slender and tall, her fascinating personality cast its spell on us.

Had it not been for her, I wonder if I myself would have ever stepped out of my sheltered and comfortable home despite the fact that my husband was popular and respected Congressman who was deeply involved in every phase of the struggle. Having just come to Delhi fresh from an Anglo-Indian college, I was somewhat confused. I lacked elementary knowledge of political conditions in



the country and the role of the Congress. I had no understanding of the anti-imperialist struggle that dominated the life of this city. With my westernised habits, I thought I could not adjust my thinking to what was happening. I would remain an outsider. I thought since I could not possibly adopt the way of life that was expected of a *Satyagrahi*. But Satyavati with her indomitable courage and burning zeal was irresistible. I was drawn to her and thereafter could not stay away from the fight. My cowardly hesitations were overcome and I plunged into action.

Married to an officer of the Delhi Cloth Mills, Satyavati had a son, Krishan, and two daughters, Kusum and Munna. One of them was a suckling infant whom she had to carry to jail with her at the time of one of her imprisonments. With Satyavati immersed in her political work when not in prison, her mother Ved Kumari, herself a participant in the movement, used to help in looking after the children.

Satyavati lit in many hearts the torch of burning love for one's country. Women from Delhi's orthodox communities came in large numbers to listen to her speeches. Young and old, we marched under her leadership and never fell back even after her frequent arrests. Satyavati became a legend in her brief life-time.

Her political maturity developed with lightning speed. Her work among Delhi's textile workers made them politically conscious and they joined the struggle. Later Satyavati became one of the founder members of the Congress Socialist Party.

With frequent jail going and the hard life she led even when free, her frail body fell a victim to the then dreaded disease, tuberculosis. Despite the serious illness, her spirit was not subdued. Satyavati ignored the advice of the doctors and went on defying every repressive onslaught of the British authorities. I was deeply moved when in 1945, after her release from prison and only a few months before her death, when I was still leading an underground life, she sent a message in the form of a Press statement expressing her happiness that I had kept the flag flying and had successfully evaded arrest.

Though Satyavati continued to guide her fellow-workers at Delhi from her sick bed, her physical frame could not stand the stresses and strains for long. Her hectic and incessant activity

brought about an untimely end to her life in 1945 when she was only 41. Satyavati had practically stopped leading a domestic life, but the mother in her came out when, realising that her end was near, she wanted that her son should marry at the earliest. A suitable bride was chosen by her relations, and though she could not travel out of Delhi to attend the marriage, her son and his bride came to her and received her blessings.

News of Satyavati's death shocked Delhi. Those of us who knew her, loved and admired her, were grief-stricken. It is impossible for me and my generation of women (and men) to forget her. Satyavati was a heroic figure of the national liberation movement, of whom the women of Delhi can be justly proud. Were it not for her, the role of Delhi women in the fight for freedom may not have reached the heights it did. It was in Delhi and Bombay that women came forward in very large numbers, astonishing the country by their matchless capacity to suffer for their beliefs. Police action, however brutal, could not crush our spirit or force us back to domestic existence.

Satyavati's magnetic personality attracted a large number of students, both boys and girls, specially of the Hindu College and the Indraprastha Girls High School and College. These students helped us to organise groups of housewives who had never before taken part in public demonstrations and the like. Prominent among such women was Memo Bai, a child widow belonging to a very conservative family of Delhi. Though totally unlettered when she came into the movement, she educated herself with the help of some of us and developed qualities of leadership and organisation which made her a close comrade and valued lieutenant of Satyavati. Among the prominent women drawn into public life by Satyavati were Sarasvati Gadodia, Parvati Didwania, Damayanti Sahni, Chando Bibi and Chand Kohli.

(A list of women freedom fighters of Delhi is given elsewhere in this volume).

The Indraprastha School and College for Girls played a significant role in this phase of the freedom struggle in Delhi because its distinguished Australian founder-principal, Miss L. Gminer, was a theosophist and an ardent follower of Annie Besant. The Home Rule League's office worked from this school and soon it began to function in close co-operation with the Indian National Congress.



Annie Besant succeeded in attracting men and women of the educated classes for the cause of the Home Rule movement before Gandhiji's arrival on the Indian scene. It was, therefore, natural for the girls and teachers of the Indraprastha School and College to volunteer for work connected with the *Satyagraha* struggle. The Chief Commissioner of Delhi threatened to withdraw the official grant to the Indraprastha institution unless Miss Gminer gave up her political activities. However, Babu Jugal Kishore, founder of the School and College, accepted the challenge and appealed to the public for funds to make up the loss resulting from withdrawal of the grant.

During the Salt *Satyagraha*, *Satyavati* and some of us decided, Delhi being a land-locked city, to assemble in a marshy vacant plot in the Shahdara suburb where the salt content of the sub-soil water was high. I remember how about fifty of us made salt in defiance of the salt laws. This went on for about ten days. Packets of salt were prepared and distributed freely. The Seva Dal volunteers of the Congress and the Mahila Samaj, who had organised the Salt *Satyagraha*, were forcibly dispersed by the Delhi police wielding lathis and hurling tear-gas bombs. This was the beginning in Delhi of the civil disobedience movement for complete independence which culminated in the Quit India struggle and Britain's withdrawal from India.

A noteworthy aspect of the 1930 *Satyagraha* and subsequent movements was that leading Congressmen encouraged their wives, daughters and even mothers to join the crusade against British rule. Swaroop Rani wife of Motilal Nehru, Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Kamala Nehru and her mother Rajpati Kaul, and many other members of the Nehru family such as Uma Nehru and Mrs. Ladorani Zutshi and Manmohini Saigal are well known. Hansa Mehta, wife of Dr. Jivraj Mehta, Mrs. Nellie Sen Gupta, and several relatives of Subhas Chandra Bose were among members of nationalist families who became comrades-in-arms of their menfolk. In Delhi, the wives of at least a dozen well-known Congressmen became their panthers in the struggle. Prof. Indra, Deshbandhu Gupta, K.D. Kohli, J.N. Sahnai, Dr. Yudhvir Singh, Jugal Kishore Khanna, Gopi Nath Aman, Ganda Mal Sharma, Nand Lal Mehta, Phool Chand Jain, Thakur Hukam Singh and my husband were among the prominent Congressmen whose

wives became their colleagues in public life and courted imprisonment in the wake of their husbands' arrest.

There were also some women fighters for freedom who were prominent on their own, as *Satyavati* was in Delhi. Sarojini Naidu was a glowing symbol of Indian womanhood, specially after she joined Gandhiji's historic Dandi March in 1930. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi from Tamil Nadu, Durgabai who later married C.D. Deshmukh, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya are among other such women leaders.

Women's participation along with men in India's mass movements is perhaps without a parallel in the world. I am convinced that had we women kept away from this exciting and crucial movement against imperialist rule, we would have remained backward.

With the acceleration of the struggle, under an order of the Viceroy the officials became ruthless in their methods of coercion. Lathi charges, firing on processions, imprisonment, imposition of Section 144 prohibiting gatherings, collective fines and confiscation of properties became the order of the day. Every act of repression hardened us. The severity with which the authorities tried to crush our spirit only strengthened our will to carry on the fight, whatever the consequence. Organising hartals, boycott of British goods, picketing of liquor shops and violation of Section 144 became daily happenings. The imprisonment of each volunteer, man or woman, who courted arrest gave everyone a thrill of satisfaction. We felt exhilarated at the thought that we were sharing the burden cast on our leaders. We led a disciplined life during the long weeks, months and years that we spent in prison. We organised the singing of patriotic songs, plying of the *charkha*, literacy classes, and bi-weekly study circles to promote awareness of the need for freedom from foreign rule in order to build a new India.

Given the opportunity, women, I am convinced, can demonstrate their capacity to break away from domestic captivity. The bulk of our fellow-prisoners had never been to school. Many of them were married when they were adolescents and some were widowed at an early age. They had never known anything other than cooking and looking after their children and their men,



washing clothes and utensils, and other domestic chores. It was only natural that, unable to read or write, they had no knowledge of national and social problems. As for women of the upper strata, their going out of the home to work, whether for emoluments or for public causes, was unheard of. Therefore, when women who were just housewives stepped out of their homes and unflinchingly faced lathi charges and firings, people everywhere were full of wonder and admiration. The citizens of Delhi in particular were amazed at the courage shown by women who had been known hitherto for their docility.

Revolutions, non-violent or otherwise, test the mettle of men and women. As the drums of liberation grew louder, Indian women plunged into the struggle all over the country and thereby earned the right to be free and equal with men. We shook the citadels of orthodoxy and conservatism. No longer could Indian women be regarded as mere goods and chattels, or objects of drawing room decoration. Whatever the handicaps we suffer from even after independence, women have much greater opportunities today to reshape society and remove backwardness wherever it exists, as equal partners of men. We cannot expect men alone to smash age-old social shackles. Men and women must together fight to remove all that comes in the way of building a new society.

I never thought when I came to Delhi at the age of about twenty that I would be able to contribute anything to the great battles that ultimately won us our freedom. The comprehension that I acquired of human nature, during the struggle, has enriched my life immeasurably. The individual experiences of women who fought for freedom could reveal much that lies buried and hidden in the inner recesses of Indian society at many levels. I often ask myself, had we women lagged behind and kept away from the tidal waves of revolution that swept our country, could we have held our heads high?

All over the world, many men and women have throughout history laid down their lives and undergone tremendous sorrow and suffering for freedom from oppression and tyranny. We of my generation in India are indeed fortunate that there came two such leaders as Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru who taught us the lesson of fearlessness and inspired us to rise above our self-centred existence. As the world is about to enter a new century, we women

of India must hasten the process of removing the debris of the past.

---

Article contributed to a volume commemorating 100 years of the Congress in Delhi.



## 9. Dr. A. V. Baliga: A Source of Inspiration

WHEN death snatches away someone on whose life so many depend for their inner sustenance, it ceases to be just nature's routine reminder that man is not immortal. It is a devastating and cruel blow which sends one reeling into depths of darkness and despair. Dr Baliga's death, to such of us as have known and worked with him for over 20 years, does not mean merely passing out of existence of a renowned surgeon and a man of unusual distinction but the removal of a vital source of inspiration.

How shall we bear this loss? To whom can we now turn for unflinching and ungrudging sympathy and support, moral and material, for every conceivable cause? Had he been less generous than he was, we would not be facing the emptiness that immediately confronts us. Whether the cause was freedom from alien rule, the struggle for ending social injustice or the task of forging bonds of friendship among progressive nations and people, Dr Baliga never failed to respond to appeals for help. Numerous institutions and thousands of individuals were able to enlist him as their well-wisher. And their number increased with every passing year because Dr Baliga could not and would not say 'No' to anyone or anything socially and politically progressive.

Though essentially devoted to his profession he never could take to the socialite way of life of a successful and affluent surgeon. The national movement, the struggle against reaction and work among the underprivileged fascinated him, not the cool and polished environs of fashionable clubs and restaurants. And yet he loved to meet and talk to men and women prominently associated with public activities.

His modest Marine Drive residence in Bombay provided a hom-

pitable and warm corner for those who were fortunate enough to know him intimately. From the highest to the humblest, Dr Baliga and his gentle wife made us all feel at home. His courteous and considerate ways were so endearing that many a foreign guest—be he from America or the Soviet Union, a high dignitary of government or a suburban social worker—everyone felt at home with him as host.

Despite the catholicity of mind and heart, there was a small inner circle of persons to whom he was intensely devoted. And one among these was (probably unknown to him) Jawaharlal Nehru. I still remember the day—it must have been in 1946, soon after the warrants for my arrest had been withdrawn—when I wanted to meet Panditji. It happened to be the 14th of November—his birthday. I was staying with Dr Baliga and Jawaharlalji came to Marine Drive. Doctor's joy knew no bounds. He had selected a neat silver cigarette box as a present and he was so happy that the interview should have been fixed on his birthday of all days. Jawaharlal Nehru was not the Prime Minister then; probably he was all the more precious because of this.

Everytime there was news of his illness Dr Baliga would telephone and want to see him—provided his official physicians did not object. Finally, when he himself took ill last September, he insisted, while his heart was still in pain, on dictating a long letter to Panditji. His doctors and friends did their best to dissuade him but gave up the effort when they found their insistence excited him all the more. Mrs Baliga said he slept in peace only when the dictation had been completed! His affection and devotion to Jawaharlal Nehru notwithstanding, whenever he felt the need to be outspoken, in particular about Bombay politics, he did not hesitate to tell him what according to him was wrong. There are a few others to whom he was deeply attached and they too enjoyed his confidence and affection. Life will ever be tinged with sadness for them now that he has gone.

Words and phrases are emptied of content when grief blurs rational thought.

Dr Baliga will be missed as a family physician, friend, guide and colleague in many a home both humble and high. But it is we in Link House, New Delhi, along with his sorrowing wife Kamal Baliga, who will miss him most and feel the absence of one who



was its presiding spirit. Amidst all else he undertook of late, working of *Link* and *Patriot* was his main preoccupation besides his professional work. These journals were for him a vehicle of attitudes, ideas and values which he believed must become an accepted part of our national consciousness and character. But for his tireless and ceaseless work neither *Link* and *Patriot* nor their printing units would have come into being. Alas, they are both as yet in their infancy and needed his powerful and dedicated support for many more years. Undoubtedly he had overworked himself; the very effort to take up the challenge of vested interests was responsible for causing a strain that proved too much.

But the privilege of exhausting oneself for ends that one holds dearer than life itself is reserved only for a few and Dr Baliga's life had truly ended in the cause of scientific pursuit. He has died as he lived, always busy, busy to the last.

---

*Link*, May 24, 1964.

## 10. Indira Gandhi: Slender Girl Who Became Immortal

---

It was at a plenary session of the Congress that I had my first glimpse of her—a bright-eyed, slender girl in a frock.

To us who were born about a decade earlier, 'Indu' was the darling child of the Nehru family. My husband who looked up to Motilal Nehru as a senior, both in public life and in the legal profession, was a friend of Jawaharlal, and my sister Purnima Banerji who lived in Allahabad, visited Anand Bhawan oftener than I did. From them I learnt over the years that Indira was sent to Pune, then to Santiniketan and Europe, for her education.

Purnima used to say that a hurt which Indira, who was deeply attached to her mother, felt as a young girl was that except for her father and grandfather, the members of the family did not treat Kamala Nehru with the consideration which was her due as Jawaharlal's wife, and which she deserved by virtue of her personal qualities. Indira's aunts, particularly the elder one, were conceited about their English education and Westernized culture, and looked down on their sister-in-law with her unsophisticated upbringing. If Kamala suggested a menu to the butler, it was liable to be countermanded on the ground that the newcomer did not know their brother's tastes. If tickets were to be brought for an English movie, Kamala would be left out because *Bhabhi* (sister-in-law) could not be expected to follow it.

With Jawaharlal Nehru frequently leaving Allahabad on political tours, or in jail, and Indira away for her education, Kamala suffered from a sense of loneliness, specially after her father-in-law's death in 1931. But involvement in the national movement gave her the opportunity to reach out of domestic walls and, overcoming



ing the social inhibitions of her middle-class upbringing, to participate in larger causes.

Besides Indira, there was another young person who was drawn to and concerned about Kamala Nehru. It was Feroze Gandhi, a Parsi boy studying at the Ewing Christian College. He was so greatly impressed by the brave lady who picketed the college during the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, that he too courted imprisonment that year and again in 1932. He would often visit Kamala Nehru and Jawaharlal at Anand Bhawan. If she fell ill he would attend on her, and when she was hospitalized in Lucknow for some months he travelled there by train twice a week to look her up. Later, when Jawaharlal was in jail and Kamala had to go to the sanatorium at Bhowali in the Kumaon hills, some 400 miles from Allahabad, Feroze visited there as often as he could. Indira thus came to know and to like this considerate young man.

When Indira went to Oxford to study at Somerville College, Feroze was at the London School of Economics. His aunt and his elder sister Tehmina Ghandy managed with an effort to muster the financial resources to send him there. Indira and Feroze met frequently while in England, and Feroze from time to time joined at the Badenweiler sanatorium in Germany where her mother was fighting a losing battle for life. Both participated in the activities of the India League directed by Krishna Menon, and plunged into the anti-Fascist movement during the Spanish Civil War. They belonged to a circle of Leftist students who included Bhupesh Gupta, Mohan Kumaramangalam, Rajni Patel and Renu, niece of Dr B.C. Roy, who later married Nikhil Chakravarty.

News that Indira was to marry Feroze reached my husband and me in Delhi. Happenings in the Nehru family being part of the staple of conversation in political circles, we also heard that there was opposition from some members of the family and from orthodox circles in the community who disapproved of a Kashmiri Brahmin girl marrying a Parsi. Objection was also raised on the ground that Feroze's family did not belong to the elite upper crust of society. Jawaharlal Nehru himself, we thought, would have preferred for his daughter a person from a family of distinction, with an intellectual background, patriotic and public-spirited—in short, someone like himself. But there had been a generational change. Unlike Jawaharlal, who had let his father arrange his



*With Indira Gandhi*



marriage, Indira made her own choice, preferring to marry a man of modest means and background whom she knew and liked and who was involved in the freedom struggle, rather than a distinguished stranger. Jawaharlal accepted his daughter's decision as soon as he realized that it was not based on a passing fancy but was well considered. And in the columns of the *Harian*, Gandhiji criticized the narrow-mindedness of those Hindus who opposed the inter-provincial and inter-community alliance.

At the marriage, which took place on 26 March 1942, Asaf and I were among the small number of invitees from outside Allahabad who were present, along with relatives of the couple from both the families. The simplicity of the ceremony, conducted in the inner precincts of Anand Bhawan, was in striking contrast to the pomp and pageantry—this used to be much talked about—which Motilal Nehru insisted on his son's marriage in 1916. Both Indira and Feroze were dressed in *Khadi*, with flowers, instead of gold and diamonds, serving as jewellery for Indira and enhancing her natural beauty. As *Vedic* verses were chanted, rose petals were showered on the couple.

The celebrations were rounded off with a typical Kashmiri feast.

While I was working underground during the "Quit India" struggle, I heard that both Indira and Feroze had been arrested at Allahabad when Indira addressed a public meeting in defiance of prohibitory orders, and lodged in Naini Jail. Four decades later, Indira Gandhi recalled one of her experiences as a political prisoner. This was when, in response to my invitation, she was good enough to inaugurate the photo type-setting and printing facility at Link House in February 1984—less than nine months before her assassination. She spoke of how she and her fellow women prisoners in Naini Jail used to follow the activities of underground freedom fighters such as myself, and other events in the country, through newspapers that were smuggled in: "In this I was greatly helped by my husband Feroze Gandhi, who happened to be in a nearby barrack with the jail dairy in between. He managed to persuade or bribe whoever worked in the dairy so that every morning at 5.30, just before we were unlocked, a little ball was thrown across—the newspaper packed very tight into a little ball. To us the noise seemed like an explosion, so loud in the quietness of the



early dawn; but fortunately the jail authorities didn't hear it. So we would walk towards it, looking very careless, and pick it up as if you were picking up a leaf that had fallen, and somehow bring it in".

After I surfaced from my underground life early in 1946, I met Jawaharlal Nehru off and on to discuss political happenings. Often the discussion was over breakfast or dinner at Teen Murti House where Indira was the hostess, having come over from Lucknow to look after her father. She came in and went out during these conversations; sometimes she joined us and gave her own opinion.

Feroze, who was managing the affairs of the *National Herald* at Lucknow, visited Delhi frequently until he, too, settled down in the Capital and entered the first Lok Sabha. He was friendly to those of us who belonged to the Left and we met often at his M.P.'s bungalow on Queen Victoria (now Dr Rajendra Prasad) Road. I remember seeing, on some of my visits to his house, Rajiv and Sanjay playing on the lawns with their father, and Indira sometimes coming in the evening and taking the children back.

Indira Gandhi's political outlook and mine were at that time often at variance. She was rooted in the Congress Party, while my chequered political career included membership of Left parties and groups. But this did not affect the warmth of our personal relations. When my husband died in Berne in April 1953 and I returned to Delhi with his body for burial in the city, with which he was so closely identified, Jawaharlal asked me to stay with him for some days at Teen Murti House. I was touched by Indira's personal attention and understanding. Later in the year when I lay precariously ill in a Moscow hospital, I found one day a flurry of activity to spruce up the place. It turned out that this was in honour of the Indian Prime Minister's daughter, who was on a visit by herself to the Soviet Union. Indira came to the hospital with a bouquet of flowers, accompanied by Ambassador K.P.S. Menon. She cheered me up and hoped that I would be back soon in Delhi.

In 1958, elections were held to the Delhi Municipal Corporation which had been newly established in place of the Municipal Committee, with enlarged territorial jurisdiction as well as greater powers. I was at that time, among other activities, engaged in constructive work under the aegis of the Bharat Sevak Samaj. And

Indira Gandhi was emerging as a political leader in her own right; she had been co-opted to the Congress Working Committee, following the hectic campaigning conducted by her on the eve of the 1957 elections. Since neither the Congress nor the Jana Sangh secured an absolute majority of seats in the Delhi Corporation, and the Congress as the largest single group could secure the majority with support from the Communist members, Feroze Gandhi came up with a suggestion. He proposed that, as I was acceptable both to the Congress and the Communists, I should be invited to stand as an independent for election as alderman. The suggestion was accepted, and I found myself elected as alderman and thereafter as Delhi's first Mayor.

Early in my tenure as Mayor, I remember Indira Gandhi telephoning me one day to say that she had read and liked my statement appealing to the corporators not to leave everything to officials but to organize area committees, draw up a plan of civic improvement for each *mohalla* and to work for its implementation. But the political understanding, responsible for my election, did not result in lasting cordiality. There was rivalry between the Congress and Communist members. Some Congressmen felt, and persuaded Indira Gandhi—who was then Congress President—to believe that I was unduly lenient to the Communist corporators. I explained to her that I could not ignore the Communists who happened to be very much more active and involved in the functioning of the Corporation compared to the Congressmen, and that there was no question of partiality. She remarked ruefully that one Communist was equal to ten Congressmen.

Subsequently we could not see eye to eye on the question of the dismissal of the Communist-led government in Kerala. I was of the view that the fate of a duly constituted government should be decided on the floor of the legislature.

Years later, when Lal Bahadur Shastri died suddenly at Tashkent, all of us associated with the magazine *Link* and later *Patriot* were enthusiastically in favour of Indira Gandhi's candidacy for leadership of the Congress Parliamentary Party. We saw in Congress President Kamaraj's espousal of Indira Gandhi as against Morarji Desai the promise of a return to and the strengthening of the Nehru legacy of democracy, socialism and secularism as against the Right-wing and vested interests in the Congress.



Among those who were unhappy with Indira Gandhi's candidature was Vijayalakshmi Pandit, who publicly expressed her doubt whether her niece, described by her as frail and of poor health, could shoulder the burdens of prime ministership. I remember laughing at this show of concern. Indira's health had indeed at an early stage been so delicate as to cause concern to her father and to Mahatma Gandhi among others. But, as Mrs Pandit should have known, Indira Gandhi had been keeping as fit as any normal healthy person since 1947, as attested by her work among riot victims during the Partition crisis, her visits to jawans in the forward areas from time to time beginning from 1962, and her strenuous public life which included travel and public speaking with a tornado-like energy.

Our enthusiasm at the prospect of Indira Gandhi becoming Prime Minister gave way to disillusionment at some of the developments that followed her assumption of office. The devaluation of the rupee in June 1966 marked the ascendancy of some pseudo-radicals who looked to the West for the country's salvation rather than to our own people and the strength inherent in them. In spite of our political differences following devaluation, when I invited Indira Gandhi to be the chief guest at the tenth anniversary celebrations of *Link* magazine, she was gracious enough to respond, and came to the function at Link House.

Things changed dramatically in 1969. I was thrilled when I came to know that Indira had made up her mind to challenge the conservative forces in the Congress. I went to her and said that her decision to oppose the Syndicate's\* bid for the Presidency was a historic step which would lead to far-reaching changes in the party and in the country. Jubilant and excited, I asked what made her decide to press the issue. She smiled and spoke of her putting down some stray thoughts on economic policy while travelling by air. Looking back, I believe that these 'stray thoughts' were the beginning of a fresh realization on her part that the future of India lay in affirming and adhering to the Nehru policies of economic self-reliance and social justice at home, and of peace and anti-imperialism abroad.

Indira Gandhi became the heroine of Link House, and so she

\*Popular name given to a group of regional leaders in the Congress Party.

remained through the stirring years of bank nationalization, abolition of the princes' privy purses, and the liberation of Bangladesh. The role of the United States of America during the Bangladesh crisis, when its 7th Fleet was deployed in the Bay of Bengal, convinced Indira Gandhi that India's national interests required the strengthening of relations with the Soviet Union which had proved itself over the years to be a reliable friend. The signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation marked the end of the fear, which she had earlier been inclined to entertain, of Moscow encouraging Indian Communists in activities hostile to the Congress.

Indira Gandhi's initiatives of the early seventies antagonized the Rightist, communal and disruptive forces. Lawless agitations were fomented by a motley combination of political groups, encouraged by hostile foreign forces intent on toppling her and destabilizing India. To arrest this dangerous trend, Indira Gandhi proclaimed a state of internal emergency. This step was supported in the initial stages by me and my colleagues of the Left. But there emerged a few months later some distortions of the emergency regulations. Well-meaning but unimaginative and harsh measures were adopted, to promote family planning and carry out slum clearance for instance, which alienated large sections of the people.

Despite these unfortunate developments, my colleagues and I were extremely depressed by the reverses suffered by the Congress Party all over Northern India in the elections of March 1977. I could never imagine that Indira Gandhi herself would be defeated. After a sleepless night, hearing and pondering on the election results as they were announced on radio, I rushed in the morning to Indira Gandhi without asking for an appointment, and saw her looking lost and desolate. I myself was greatly affected and found it hard to believe that she would no longer be at the helm of affairs. I held her hands and told her of my intuitive conviction that the great misunderstanding between her and the people was temporary. Her eyes filled with tears when I said to her that the people would come back to her. "When", she asked sadly, "after I am dead?" No, I said with confidence, she would be vindicated very soon. Little did I know then that she would be re-elected to the Lok Sabha within twenty months and would resume prime



ministership in less than three years.

I used to meet Indira Gandhi often during the years when she was out of office. The way she faced the vindictive persecution by the Janata Government evoked my admiration, even as I felt disgusted by the witch hunting, the court trials on cooked-up charges, and her expulsion from the Lok Sabha after she fought her way back in the Chikmagalur by-election. She toured the country extensively, visiting in particular the victims of oppression and exploitation, as at Belchi. She exercised a magnetic attraction wherever she went, not least in the Capital itself: shopping in Connaught Place, or at diplomatic receptions or wedding parties. She continued to speak out her mind on international issues, whether in connection with the meeting of the nonaligned in Cuba or about the barbarous Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, and gained the attention and respect of the socialist and nonaligned countries.

Her triumphal return to power in midterm elections of January 1980, following the disintegration of the Janata combine, was soon marred by a personal tragedy, the death of beloved second son Sanjay, in an air crash. I was amazed at the way she overcame her grief quickly and resumed her strenuous schedule of work. She brought India back to the centre of the international stage from the periphery. I watched with joy as this daughter of India, as Chairperson of the Nonaligned Movement, recaptured the spirit of the 'fifties when her father initiated the Movement along with such other political giants of that time as Marshal Tito and President Nasser. Simultaneously, she pressed forward with the task of making India self-reliant in economic growth and defence, though buffeted by agitations in Assam and Punjab that tested her mettle. She was fully aware that certain Western powers were alarmed at her growing strength, her forthright condemnation of imperialism, her refusal to be pressurized by any big power, and her insistence on judging person. Little did they know that, she was a fighter .... This renewal of Jawaharlal Nehru's spirit filled me with pride.

As an individual, Indira Gandhi was much misunderstood. There were many who thought of her as a ruthless and unforgiving person. Little did they know that while she was a fighter who gave no quarter and asked for none, there was another side to her which

was intensely human and tender. She was deeply disappointed that the Communists did not stand up for her when she was being persecuted by the Janata Government even after her election to the Lok Sabha from Chikmagalur in 1978. And yet when Bhupesh Gupta, an incessant and trenchant critic of hers during and after the Emergency, passed away, she went to Ajoy Bhawan, headquarters of the Communist Party of India, and stood silently by the body, lost in grief for an old friend.

Is it not an irony of history that one who symbolized India's unity and was as dear to her constituents in Chikmagalur and Medak in the South as in Rae Bareilly in the North, should have been felled with inhuman brutality by the bullets of separatists out to dismember the country? Her assassination has placed her among the glorious martyrs of every continent.

My last meeting with her was on 15 October, 1984. I told her of the ominous rumours I had heard, of her impending liquidation, during my visits to Punjab to promote the Rashtriya Ekta Andolan in an effort to prevent a communal flare-up; of the bitterness felt by fanatical elements, even including women in the Sikh community. I urged her to take great care of herself and to curtail her movements. "I can't give up meeting the people," she said. "Why not wear a bullet-proof jacket at least?" I asked. She smiled the suggestion away.

Such was her courage, and such her trust that she did not countenance the idea of changing the composition of her bodyguard. She could not imagine the possibility of being done to death by the very persons to whom her personal security was entrusted.

Immortality in the physical sense is not given to human beings. But some are remembered by future generations for what they did, for the currents of thought and of action they released among the people. Among such is Indira Gandhi. Let us not, therefore, keep mourning her death. Instead, let us strive for happiness as Indira Gandhi once defined it—a definition which could also be a fitting epitaph for her:

Happiness is a very big word. I do not think it consists in material possessions, in having more of what we want. I think happiness comes when you know you are doing the right thing, that you are devoting yourself to a cause bigger than yourself, that you are doing something which will bring some



solace and succour to others. This is the happiness which should like to wish for all of you.

Watching the flames that reduced Indira's delicate frame to ashes, I wondered whether it was the end of the era she represented, or would the dynamism of that era re-emerge, like the Phoenix from her ashes?

---

Article contributed to *INDIRA GANDHI: Statesmen, Scholars, Scientists and Friends Remember*, commemorative volume edited by G. Parthasarathi and H.Y. Sharada Prasad, Vikas Publishing House, 1985.